

STORY

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STORY

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MISS CYNTHIE

by

Rudolph Fisher

FOR the first time in her life somebody had called her "madam." She had been standing, bewildered but unafraid, while innumerable Red Caps appropriated piece after piece of the baggage arrayed on the platform. Neither her brief seventy years' journey through life nor her long two days' travel northward had dimmed the live brightness of her eyes, which, for all their bewilderment, had accurately selected her own treasures out of the row of luggage and guarded them vigilantly.

"These yours, madam?"

The biggest Red Cap of all was smiling at her. He looked for all the world like Doc Crinshaw's oldest son back home. Her little brown face relaxed; she smiled back at him.

"They got to be. You all done took all the others."

He laughed aloud. Then—"Carry 'em in for you?"

She contemplated his bulk. "Reckon you can manage it—puny little feller like you?"

Thereupon they were friends. Still grinning broadly, he surrounded himself with her impedimenta, the enormous brown extension-case on one shoulder, the big straw suitcase in the opposite hand, the carpet-bag under one arm. She herself held fast to the umbrella.

"Always like to have sump'm in my hand when I walk. Can't never tell when you'll run across a snake."

"There aren't any snakes in the city."

"There's snakes everywhere, chile."

They began the tedious hike up the interminable platform. She was small and quick. Her carriage was surprisingly erect, her gait astonishingly spry. She said:

"You liked to took my breath back yonder, boy, callin' me 'madam.' Back home everybody call me 'Miss Cynthia.' Even my own chillun. Even

their chillun. Black folks, white folks too. 'Miss Cynthia.' Well, when you come up with that 'madam' o' yourn, I say to myself, 'Now, I wonder who that chile's a-grinnin' at? 'Madam' stand for mist'ess o' the house, and I sho' ain' mist'ess o' nothin' in this hyeh New York.'

"Well, you see, we call everybody 'madam.' "

"Everybody?—Hm." The bright eyes twinkled. "Seem like that'd worry me some—if I was a man."

He acknowledged his slip and observed, "I see this isn't your first trip to New York."

"First trip any place, son. First time I been over fifty mile from Waxhaw. Only travelin' I've done is in my head. Ain' seen many places, but I's seen a passel o' people. Reckon places is pretty much alike after people been in 'em awhile."

"Yes, ma'am. I guess that's right."

"You ain' no reg'lar bag-toter, is you?"

"Ma'am?"

"You talk too good."

"Well, I only do this in vacation-time. I'm still in school."

"You is. What you aimin' to be?"

"I'm studying medicine."

"You is?" She beamed. "Aimin' to be a doctor, huh? Thank the Lord for that. That's what I always wanted my David to be. My grandchile hyeh in New York. He's to meet me hyeh now."

"I bet you'll have a great time."

"Mussn't bet, chile. That's sinful. I tole him 'fo' he left home, I say, 'Son, you the only one o' the chillun what's got a chance to amount to sump'm. Don' th'ow it away. Be a preacher or a doctor. Work yo' way up and don' stop short. If the Lord don' see fit for you to doctor the soul, then doctor the body. If you don' get to be a reg'lar doctor, be a tooth-doctor. If you jes' can't make that, be a foot-doctor. And if you don' get that fur, be a undertaker. That's the least you must be. That ain' so bad. Keep you acquainted with the house of the Lord. Always mind the house o' the Lord—whatever you do, do like a church-steeple: aim high and go straight.' "

"Did he get to be a doctor?"

"Don' b'lieve he did. Too late startin', I reckon. But he's done succeeded at sump'm. Mus' be at least a undertaker, 'cause he started sendin' the home-folks money, and he come home las' year dressed like Judge Pettiford's boy

what went off to school in Virginia. Wouldn't tell none of us 'zackly what he was doin', but he said he wouldn't never be happy till I come and see for myself. So hyeh I is." Something softened her voice. "His mammy died befo' he knowed her. But he was always sech a good chile—" The something was apprehension. "Hope he *is* a undertaker."

They were mounting a flight of steep stairs leading to an exit-gate, about which clustered a few people still hoping to catch sight of arriving friends. Among these a tall young brown-skinned man in a light grey suit suddenly waved his panama and yelled, "Hey, Miss Cynthie!"

Miss Cynthie stopped, looked up, and waved back with a delighted umbrella. The Red Cap's eyes lifted too. His lower jaw sagged.

"Is that your grandson?"

"It sho' is," she said and distanced him for the rest of the climb. The grandson, with an abandonment that superbly ignored on-lookers, folded the little woman in an exultant, smothering embrace. As soon as she could, she pushed him off with breathless mock impatience.

"Go 'way, you fool, you. Aimin' to squeeze my soul out my body befo' I can get a look at this place?" She shook herself into the semblance of composure. "Well. You don' look hungry, anyhow."

"Ho-ho! Miss Cynthie in New York! Can y' imagine this? Come on. I'm parked on Eighth Avenue."

The Red Cap delivered the outlandish luggage into a robin's egg blue open Packard with scarlet wheels, accepted the grandson's dollar and smile, and stood watching the car roar away up Eighth Avenue.

Another Red Cap came up. "Got a break, hey, boy?"

"Dave Tappen himself—can you beat that?"

"The old lady hasn't seen the station yet—starin' at him."

"That's not the half of it, bozo. That's Dave Tappen's grandmother. And what do you s'pose she hopes?"

"What?"

"She hopes that Dave has turned out to be a successful undertaker!"

"Undertaker? Undertaker!"

They stared at each other a gaping moment, then doubled up with laughter.

"Look—through there—that's the Chrysler Building. Oh, hell-elujah! I meant to bring you up Broadway—"

"David—"

"Ma'am?"

"This hyeh wagon yourn?"

"Nobody else's. Sweet buggy, ain't it?"

"David—you ain't turned out to be one of them moonshiners, is you?"

"Moonshiners—? Moon—Ho! No indeed, Miss Cynthie. I got a better racket 'n that."

"Better which?"

"Game. Business. Pick-up."

"Tell me, David. What is yo' racket?"

"Can't spill it yet, Miss Cynthie. Rather show you. Tomorrow night you'll know the worst. Can't you make out till tomorrow night?"

"David, you know I always wanted you to be a doctor, even if 'twasn' nothin' but a foot-doctor. The very leas' I wanted you to be was a undertaker."

"Undertaker! Oh, Miss Cynthie!—with my sunny disposition?"

"Then you ain' even a undertaker?"

"Listen, Miss Cynthie. Just forget 'bout what I am for awhile. Just till tomorrow night. I want you to see for yourself. Tellin' you will spoil it. Now stop askin', you hear?—because I'm not answerin'—I'm surprisin' you. And don't expect anybody you meet to tell you. It'll mess up the whole works. Understand? Now give the big city a break. There's the elevated train going up Columbus Avenue. Ain't that hot stuff?"

Miss Cynthie looked. "Humph!" she said. "Tain' half high as that trestle two mile from Waxhaw."

She thoroughly enjoyed the ride up Central Park West. The stagger lights, the extent of the park, the high, close, kingly dwellings, remarkable because their stoves cooled them in summer as well as heated them in winter, all drew nods of mild interest. But what gave her special delight was not these: it was that David's car so effortlessly sped past the headlong drove of vehicles racing northward.

They stopped for a red light; when they started again their machine leaped forward with a triumphant eagerness that drew from her an unsuppressed "Hot you, David! That's it!"

He grinned appreciatively. "Why, you're a regular New Yorker already."

"New Yorker nothin'! I done the same thing fifty years ago—befo' I knowed they was a New York."

"What!"

"'Deed so. Didn' I use to tell you 'bout my young mare, Betty? Chile, I'd hitch Betty up to yo' grandpa's buggy and pass anything on the road. Betty never knowed what another horse's dust smelt like. No 'ndeedy. Shuh, boy, this ain' nothin' new to me. Why that broke-down Fo'd yo' uncle Jake's got ain' nothin'—nothin' but a sorry mess. Done got so slow I jes' won' ride in it—I declare I'd rather walk. But this hyeh thing, now, this is right nice." She settled back in complete, complacent comfort, and they sped on, swift and silent.

Suddenly she sat erect with abrupt discovery.

"David—well—bless my soul!"

"What's the matter, Miss Cynthia?"

Then he saw what had caught her attention. They were traveling up Seventh Avenue now, and something was miraculously different. Not the road; that was as broad as ever, wide, white gleaming in the sun. Not the houses; they were lofty still, lordly, disdainful, supercilious. Not the cars; they continued to race impatiently onward, innumerable, precipitate, tumultuous. Something else, something at once obvious and subtle, insistent, pervasive, compelling.

"David—this mus' be Harlem!"

"Good Lord, Miss Cynthia—!"

"Don' use the name of the Lord in vain, David."

"But I mean—gee!—you're no fun at all. You get everything before a guy can tell you."

"You got plenty to tell me, David. But don' nobody need to tell me this. Look a yonder."

Not just a change of complexion. A completely dissimilar atmosphere. Sidewalks teeming with leisurely strollers, at once strangely dark and bright. Boys in white trousers, berets, and green shirts, with slickened black heads and proud swagger. Bareheaded girls in crisp organdie dresses, purple, canary, gay scarlet. And laughter, abandoned strong Negro laughter, some falling full on the ear, some not heard at all, yet sensed—the warm life-breath of the tireless carnival to which Harlem's heart quickens in summer.

"This is it," admitted David. "Get a good eyeful. Here's One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street—regular little Broadway. And here's the Alhambra, and up ahead we'll pass the Lafayette."

"What's them?"

"Theatres."

"Theatres? Theatres. Humph! Look, David—is that a colored folks church?" They were passing a fine gray-stone edifice.

"That? Oh. Sure it is. So's this one on this side."

"No! Well, ain' that fine? Splendid big church like that for colored folks."

Taking his cue from this, her first tribute to the city, he said, "You ain't seen nothing yet. Wait a minute."

They swung left through a side-street and turned right on a boulevard. "What do you think o' that?" And he pointed to the quarter-million-dollar St. Mark's.

"That a colored church, too?"

"'Tain' no white one. And they built it themselves, you know. Nobody's hand-me-down gift."

She heaved a great happy sigh. "Oh, yes, it was a gift, David. It was a gift from on high." Then, "Look a hyeh—which a one you belong to?"

"Me? Why, I don't belong to any—that is, none o' these. Mine's over in another section. Y'see, mine's Baptist. These are all Methodist. See?"

"M-m. Uh-huh. I see."

They circled a square and slipped into a quiet narrow street overlooking a park, stopping before the tallest of the apartment-houses in the single commanding row.

Alighting, Miss Cynthia gave this imposing structure one sidewise, upward glance, and said, "Y'all live like bees in a hive, don't y'?—I boun' the women does all the work, too." A moment later, "So this is a elevator? Feel like I'm glory-bound sho' nuff."

Along a tiled corridor and into David's apartment. Rooms leading into rooms. Luxurious couches, easy-chairs, a brown-walnut grand piano, gay-shaded floor lamps, panelled walls, deep rugs, treacherous glass-wood floors—and a smiling golden-skinned girl in a gingham house-dress, approaching with outstretched hands.

"This is Ruth, Miss Cynthia."

"Miss Cynthia!" said Ruth.

They clasped hands. "Been wantin' to see David's girl ever since he first wrote us 'bout her."

"Come—here's your room this way. Here's the bath. Get out of your things and get comfy. You must be worn out with the trip."

"Worn out? Worn out? Shuh. How you gon' get worn out on a train? Now if 'twas a horse, maybe, or Jake's no-'count Fo'd—but a train—didn' but one thing bother me on that train."

"What?"

"When the man made them beds down, I jes' couldn' manage to undress same as at home. Why, s'posin' sump'm bus' the train open—where'd you be? Naked as a jay-bird in dew-berry time."

David took in her things and left her to get comfortable. He returned, and Ruth, despite his reassuring embrace, whispered:

"Dave, you can't fool old folks—why don't you go ahead and tell her about yourself? Think of the shock she's going to get—at her age."

David shook his head. "She'll get over the shock if she's there looking on. If we just told her, she'd never understand. We've got to railroad her into it. Then she'll be happy."

"She's nice. But she's got the same ideas as all old folks—"

"Yea—but with her you can change 'em. Specially if everything is really all right. I know her. She's for church and all, but she believes in good times too, if they're right. Why, when I was a kid—" He broke off. "Listen!"

Miss Cynthia's voice came quite distinctly to them, singing a jaunty little rhyme:

*"Oh I danced with the gal with the hole in her stockin',
And her toe kep' a-kickin' and her heel kep' a-knockin'—*

*Come up, Jesse, and get a drink o' gin,
'Cause you near to the heaven as you'll ever get ag'in."*

"She taught me that when I wasn't knee-high to a cricket," David said. Miss Cynthia still sang softly and merrily:

*"Then I danced with the gal with the dimple in her cheek,
And if she'd 'a' kep' a-smilin', I'd 'a' danced for a week—"*

"God forgive me," prayed Miss Cynthia as she discovered David's purpose the following night. She let him and Ruth lead her, like an early Christian martyr, into the Lafayette Theatre. The blinding glare of the lobby produced a merciful self-anaesthesia, and she entered the sudden dimness of the interior as involuntarily as in a dream—

Attendants outdid each other for Mr. Dave Tappen. She heard him tell

them, "Fix us up till we go on," and found herself sitting between Ruth and David in the front row of a lower box. A miraculous device of the devil, a motion-picture that talked, was just ending. At her feet the orchestra was assembling. The motion-picture faded out amid a scattered round of applause. Lights blazed and the orchestra burst into an ungodly rumpus.

She looked out over the seated multitude, scanning row upon row of illumined faces, black faces, white faces, yellow, tan, brown; bald heads, bobbed heads, kinky and straight heads; and upon every countenance, expectancy,—scowling expectancy in this case, smiling in that, complacent here, amused there, commentative elsewhere, but everywhere suspense, abeyance, anticipation.

Half a dozen people were ushered down the nearer aisle to reserved seats in the second row. Some of them caught sight of David and Ruth and waved to them. The chairs immediately behind them in the box were being shifted. "Hello, Tap!" Miss Cynthia saw David turn, rise, and shake hands with two men. One of them was large, bald and pink, emanating good cheer; the other short, thin, sallow with thick black hair and a sour mien. Ruth also acknowledged their greeting. "This is my grandmother," David said proudly. "Miss Cynthia, meet my managers, Lou and Lee Goldman." "Pleased to meet you," managed Miss Cynthia. "Great lad, this boy of yours," said Lou Goldman. "Great little partner he's got, too," added Lee. They also settled back expectantly.

"Here we go!"

The curtain rose to reveal a cotton-field at dawn. Pickers in blue denim overalls, bandanas, and wide-brimmed straws, or in gingham aprons and sun-bonnets, were singing as they worked. Their voices, from clearest soprano to richest bass, blended in low concordances, first simply humming a series of harmonies, until, gradually, came words, like figures forming in mist. As the sound grew, the mist cleared, the words came round and full, and the sun rose bringing light as if in answer to the song. The chorus swelled, the radiance grew, the two, as if emanating from a single source, fused their crescendos, till at last they achieved a joint transcendence of tonal and visual brightness.

"Swell opener," said Lee Goldman.

"Ripe," agreed Lou.

David and Ruth arose. "Stay here and enjoy the show, Miss Cynthia. You'll see us again in a minute."

"Go to it, kids," said Lou Goldman.

"Yea—burn 'em up," said Lee.

Miss Cynthia hardly noted that she had been left, so absorbed was she in the spectacle. To her, the theatre had always been the antithesis of the church. As the one was the refuge of righteousness, so the other was the stronghold of transgression. But this first scene awakened memories, captured and held her attention by offering a blend of truth and novelty. Having thus baited her interest, the show now proceeded to play it like the trout through swift-flowing waters of wickedness. Resist as it might, her mind was caught and drawn into the impious subsequences.

The very music that had just rounded out so majestically now distorted itself into ragtime. The singers came forward and turned to dancers; boys, a crazy, swaying background, threw up their arms and kicked out their legs in a rhythmic jamboree; girls, an agile, brazen foreground, caught their skirts up to their hips and displayed their copper calves, knees, thighs, in shameless, incredible steps. Miss Cynthia turned dismayed eyes upon the audience, to discover that mob of sinners devouring it all with fond satisfaction. Then the dancers separated and with final abandon flung themselves off the stage in both directions.

Lee Goldman commented through the applause, "They work easy, them babies."

"Yea," said Lou. "Savin' the hot stuff for later."

Two black-faced cotton-pickers appropriated the scene, indulging in dialogue that their hearers found uproarious,

"Ah'm tired."

"Ah'm hongry."

"Dis job jes' wears me out."

"Starves me to death."

"Ah'm so tired—you know what Ah'd like to do?"

"What?"

"Ah'd like to go to sleep and dream I was sleepin'."

"What good dat do?"

"Den I could wake up and still be 'sleep."

"Well y' know what Ah'd like to do?"

"No. What?"

"Ah'd like to swaller me a hog and a hen."

"What good dat do?"

"Den Ah'd always be full o' ham and eggs."

"Ham? Shuh. Don't you know a hog has to be smoked 'fo' he's a ham?"

"Well, if I swaller him, he'll have a smoke all around him, won' he?"

Presently Miss Cynthie was smiling like everyone else, but her smile soon fled. For the comics departed, and the dancing girls returned, this time in scant travesties on their earlier voluminous costumes — tiny sunbonnets perched jauntily on one side of their glistening bobs, bandanas reduced to scarlet neck-ribbons, waists mere brassieres, skirts mere gingham sashes.

And now Miss Cynthie's whole body stiffened with a new and surpassing shock; her bright eyes first widened with unbelief, then slowly grew dull with misery. In the midst of a sudden great volley of applause her grandson had broken through that bevy of agile wantons and begun to sing.

He too was dressed as a cotton-picker, but a Beau Brummel among cotton-pickers; his hat bore a pleated green band, his bandana was silk, his overalls blue satin, his shoes black patent leather. His eyes flashed, his teeth gleamed, his body swayed, his arms waved, his words came fast and clear. As he sang, his companions danced a concerted tap, uniformly wild, ecstatic. When he stopped singing, he himself began to dance, and without sacrificing crispness of execution, seemed to absorb into himself every measure of the energy which the girls, now merely standing off and swaying, had relinquished.

"Look at that boy go," said Lee Goldman.

"He ain't started yet," said Lou.

But surrounding comment, Dave's virtuosity, the eager enthusiasm of the audience were all alike lost on Miss Cynthie. She sat with stricken eyes watching this boy whom she'd raised from a babe, taught right from wrong, brought up in the church, and endowed with her prayers, this child whom she had dreamed of seeing a preacher, a regular doctor, a tooth-doctor, a foot-doctor, at the very least an undertaker—sat watching him disport himself for the benefit of a sinsick, flesh-hungry mob of lost souls, not one of whom knew or cared to know the loving kindness of God; sat watching a David she'd never foreseen, turned tool of the devil, disciple of lust, unholy prince among sinners.

For a long time she sat there watching with wretched eyes, saw portrayed on the stage David's arrival in Harlem, his escape from "old friends" who tried to dupe him; saw him working as a trap-drummer in a night-club, where he fell in love with Ruth, a dancer; not the gentle Ruth Miss Cynthie

knew, but a wild and shameless young savage who danced like seven devils—in only a girdle and breast-plates; saw the two of them join in a song-and-dance act that eventually made them Broadway headliners, an act presented *in toto* as the pre-finale of this show. And not any of the melodies, not any of the sketches, not all the comic philosophy of the tired-and-hungry duo, gave her figure a moment's relaxation or brightened the dull defeat in her staring eyes. She sat apart, alone in the box, the symbol, the epitome of supreme failure. Let the rest of the theatre be riotous, clamoring for more and more of Dave Tappen, "Tap," the greatest tapster of all time, idol of uptown and downtown New York. For her, they were lauding simply an exhibition of sin which centered about her David.

"This'll run a year on Broadway," said Lee Goldman.

"Then we'll take it to Paris."

Encores and curtains with Ruth, and at last David came out on the stage alone. The clamor dwindled. And now he did something quite unfamiliar to even the most consistent of his followers. Softly, delicately, he began to tap a routine designed to fit a particular song. When he had established the rhythm, he began to sing the song:

*"Oh I danced with the gal with the hole in her stockin',
And her toe kep' a-kickin' and her heel kep' a-knockin'*

*Come up, Jesse, and get a drink o' gin,
'Cause you near to the heaven as you'll ever get ag'in—"*

As he danced and sang this song, frequently smiling across at Miss Cynthia, a visible change transformed her. She leaned forward incredulously, listened intently, then settled back in limp wonder. Her bewildered eyes turned on the crowd, on those serried rows of shriftless sinners. And she found in their faces now an overwhelmingly curious thing: a grin, a universal grin, a gleeful and sinless grin such as not the nakedest chorus in the performance had produced. In a few seconds, with her own song, David had dwarfed into unimportance, wiped off their faces, swept out of their minds every trace of what had seemed to be sin; had reduced it all to mere trivial detail and revealed these revelers as a crowd of children, enjoying the guileless antics of another child. And Miss Cynthia whispered her discovery aloud:

by Rudolph Fisher

"Bless my soul! They didn't mean nothin' . . . They jes' didn' see no harm in it—"

*"Then I danced with the gal with the dimple in her cheek,
And if she'd 'a' kep' a-smilin' I'd 'a' danced for a week—*

Come up, Jesse—"

The crowd laughed, clapped their hands, whistled. Someone threw David a bright yellow flower. "From Broadway!"

He caught the flower. A hush fell. He said:

"I'm really happy tonight, folks. Y'see this flower? Means success, don't it? Well, listen. The one who is really responsible for my success is here tonight with me. Now what do you think o' that?"

The hush deepened.

"Y'know folks, I'm sump'm like Adam—I never had no mother. But I've got a grandmother. Down home everybody calls her Miss Cynthie. And everybody loves her. Take that song I just did for you. Miss Cynthie taught me that when I wasn't knee-high to a cricket. But that wasn't all she taught me. For back as I can remember, she used to always say one thing: 'Son, do like a church steeple—aim high and go straight.' And for doin' it—" he grinned, contemplating the flower—"I get this."

He strode across to the edge of the stage that touched Miss Cynthie's box. He held up the flower.

"So y'see, folks, this isn't mine. It's really Miss Cynthie's." He leaned over to hand it to her. Miss Cynthie's last trace of doubt was swept away. She drew a deep breath of revelation; her bewilderment vanished, her redoubtable composure returned, her eyes lighted up; and no one but David, still holding the flower toward her, heard her sharply whispered reprimand:

"Keep it, you fool you. Where's yo' manners—givin' 'way what somebody give you?"

David grinned:

"Take it, tyro. What you tryin' to do—crab my act?"

Thereupon, Miss Cynthie, smiling at him with bright, meaningful eyes, leaned over without rising from her chair, jerked a tiny twig off the stem of the flower, then sat decisively back, resolutely folding her arms, with only a leaf in her hand.

"This'll do me," she said.

The finale didn't matter. People filed out of the theatre. Miss Cynthia sat awaiting her children, her foot absently patting time to the orchestra's jazz recessional. Perhaps she was thinking, "God moves in a mysterious way," but her lips were unquestionably forming the words:

*"—danced with the gal—hole in her stockin'—
—toe kep' a-kickin'—heel kep' a-knockin'—"*

FIRST LOVE

by

Stoyan Christowe

MY father wiped his mouth with the napkin and brushed his drooping mustaches. He then broke another morsel of bread and his spoon again sallied forth. My mother kept looking before her and quietly chewed at her food. I myself dipped my own spoon moodily in the bowl and bit at my slice of bread.

No word passed between my parents. I concluded that they had quarreled, which they seldom did, and that I was the cause of it. The silence was oppressive. The only noise was made by the three spoons as they made their reluctant journeys from bowl to mouth.

At last my mother cleared the dishes and the table and my father bent over the copper pot in the hearth to watch his brewing after-supper Turkish coffee. I sat opposite him and stared at the fire, my mind still burdened with the silence.

Finally my mother spoke, the first to break the silence. And she spoke to me, in a firm, determined tone. "Radan," she said, "you go to sleep with Vanna this night. Do you hear? Don't stare at me like that!"

The coffee rose to the brim of the copper vessel ready to spill out when my father blew at it quickly and snatched it out of the fire. Having saved the spuming cream at the top, without which Turkish coffee is like beer without foam, he poured the thick beverage in the painted porcelain cup before him and turned toward my mother.

"Why couldn't one of the neighbor girls spend the night with her? Why must he go?"

My mother made no reply and went on with her work as if he had not spoken to her.

Vanna was my cousin Todor's bride. She was from another district. Twelve men had gone to fetch her as a bride. They were mounted on gaily

caparisoned mules and horses and were led by a *bairaktar*—a man who held aloft a pole on which fluttered, like a sheet of flame, a speckled red bandana and at the top of which was impaled an apple, garlanded with flowers.

Across the bows of the saddles dangled carved wine-casks ornamented with bunches of hyssop. And the breeches and jackets of the men were embroidered with gold and silver threads and with woolen twist dyed in the bark of fir-trees and in the hull of walnuts.

To the tune of a droning bagpipe and the rhythm of a folksong, the wedding cavalcade disappeared into the groves of willows and poplars down the valley.

"How far will they go?" I asked my mother.

"Only across the Struma," she replied. "For your bride we shall cross the Vardar." My mother always said that I would bring a wife from beyond the Vardar.

Three days passed since they went to search for a bride for Todor and still they had not returned. In two days they could have gone beyond the Struma and come back. Maybe the Struma had flooded its banks and they had to ride far up to find a shallow place where they could ford it without danger. But in our valley it had not rained! When it rains, does it not rain all over the world at the same time? No, they had gone beyond the Vardar!

All through the third day I sat on the balcony of our house and kept vigil in the direction of the vineyards.

At noon on the fourth day the wind brought detached squeals of the bagpipe and snatches of the wedding song.

At last the valley disgorged the cavalcade at the same point at which four days before it had swallowed it.

A horseman tore himself away from the group and rode ahead with the sound of the bagpipe. The horse played with the air; the horseman's body bobbed in the saddle. When he met the village folk, who had turned out to welcome the bride, he pulled a pistol from his sash and fired into the clouds. The noise of the explosion re-echoed through the valley.

A red kerchief splattered with yellow dots was tied to the man's right ear. His fur cap bloomed with flowers; a pair of socks hung across his breast like a decoration for bravery. From his wine-cask he spilled red liquid on the ground; and from his mouth, the words, "Long live the bride and the groom!"

He then turned his charger and galloped back to rejoin his comrades.

At last the wedding procession rode triumphantly into the village. The apple at the top of the flagpole had shrunk; the flowers which buttressed it had faded; the wine-casks dangled empty; and the horses, the motley blankets, the clothes of the men, were all besmeared with the mud of the Vardar.

Man-fashion astride a white mare, her feet in the stirrups, the bride rode past us, a man walking on either side of her mount. A red veil fell like a hood from her head and covered her face. In sweeping folds of brilliant embroidery, her skirts reached almost to her slippers, which were of black and red leather and trimmed with silver and gold brocade. Locked in the stirrups, they looked like tropical birds caught in traps. Immediately behind the bride rode my cousin Todor. He seemed to me like a warrior-prince returning from distant conquests and bringing with him a princess as his prize.

The procession stopped in the courtyard of my cousin Todor's house. As they helped the bride alight from her white mount, my heart fluttered lest some part of her be exposed. But the attendants were as careful as if she were a precious vase the merest scratch upon whose surface might impair its value and mar its beauty.

Todor's old mother, herself dressed in the gorgeous bridal costume of another generation and another district, came out into the courtyard to meet her son's bride. Three times Vanna bowed before her mother-in-law and three times she kissed her through the veil. The old mother then lifted the bridal veil to see the face of this bride from beyond the Vardar.

My heart twitched with pain at the sight of Vanna's face. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. In the picturesque wedding costume of her district, she stood in the courtyard erect and radiant, like a thing of splendor.

On the following day the whole village took part in the wedding festivities. I alone stayed indoors. Vainly my mother coaxed me to go out.

But though I stayed in I saw more than anyone that was present. Not a single detail of the ceremony escaped my vision. From the pieces which the bagpiper played and the songs which the bridesmaids sang, I knew when they were shaving the groom, when they made him kiss the loaf of bread with the salt on the top of it, and when they made him drink from the wineglass. And I knew exactly at what time the priest came for the solemnities. I saw him transpose the tin crowns on the heads of the bride and the groom, and the ring on their fingers.

When they took the bride "to water" at the brook and she was drinking from my cousin Todor's boot, the door of the room in which I had imprisoned myself opened and my mother walked in.

"Are you ill?" she asked.

"No!"

"Then why don't you come out and see Todor's bride?"

"I saw her yesterday!"

She placed her cool palm on my forehead. "You have a headache!" she exclaimed. "Your forehead burns like an ember. You are ill!"

"No!"

She took off her headkerchief and soaked it in cold water. Then she folded it and tied it like a band around my head.

"Lie down. You'll soon be having the fever." She wrapped me with a blanket.

My whole body shivered under the quilt, as if I had actually been ridden with the ague. I wouldn't have felt so if my mother hadn't insisted that I was ill. . . .

The village quickly recovered from the excitement of so distant and so beautiful a bride and resumed its measured existence. Nothing could change the life of the village. Though a thousand beautiful brides had come to adorn it, still oxen had to be yoked and the plowshare buried in the soil. Even my cousin Todor, whose soul and heart should have been possessed by the treasure that enriched his house, rewedded himself to the soil soon after the priest wedded him to his beautiful bride.

I alone remained impervious to the witchery of the soil. Women thought I had become the victim of evil-minded hags who prowled in the night and hung knots of thread and twists of dough on brier-bushes or left them at cross-roads or at the thresholds of houses. My mother was urged by our neighbors to take me to the monastery of St. George that I might kiss the icon that had the power to untie magics. But my mother disregarded all these suggestions.

In the months that followed I saw Vanna frequently. I saw her by the stream as she pounded on wet clothes with a heavy wooden pad; I saw her in the fields as she tossed her bare head amidst the swaying wheat; and on the roads later returning with a basket of glinting grapes balanced on her head like a crown. But I never spoke to her, or ever heard her say my name. Whenever she came near me I bowed my head and turned my eyes away.

And now I was being sent to sleep with her. She was alone in her house. Todor had gone to the mountain to sow the winter rye. She also had gone to assist in the ritual of planting the first seed, but she returned to bring back the pony so that her mother-in-law could go to the market-town for provisions before the winter snows had blocked the passage across the hills.

After my father had sipped passionately from his coffee, he bit the mouthpiece of his amber *tchibouk* and blew at it. The stub of the burning cigarette at the other end dropped in the fire like a bullet propelled by his breath. He rolled himself a fresh cigarette, fitted it carefully to the holder, lit it with a spill, and filling his lungs with the smoke, turned toward me with sarcasm in his voice.

"Well, why don't you go? She must be waiting for you!"

I did not leave the house until my mother had asked me to once more. And then as I walked out my heart throbbed fast and my whole body shook with excitement. Outside lights glimmered at windows and noises came out—a child wailing as it was put to sleep; a mother's scolding voice screeching in the night like an owl's.

Before I knew it I was in the courtyard of my cousin Todor's house. There was a light at one of the windows in the living room. And I felt a sudden spasm of pleasure at the thought that Vanna was waiting for me. Then again instantly sprang before my eyes the picture of the priest wedding her to my cousin Todor.

My hand found the door-knocker and made ready to strike when fear that the noise would rouse the neighbors arrested my motion. Heads would stick out at windows; voices would giggle; the whole village might learn!

So instead of knocking, I pushed at the door and pawed and scratched at it like a dog demanding entrance into his mistress' apartment. Vanna must have heard, for I soon heard her voice coming from within, "Is that you, Radan?"

It was the first time I had heard her say my name.

"Yes," I replied.

The door swung inward, bowing like a lackey to make way for my entry.

"My mother sent me . . ." I stammered.

"Yes, I have been waiting for you."

For me! She, waiting at night alone in her house! For a moment I felt my body swaying with the keenest joy I had yet experienced.

She led the way with the torch in her hand. We came to the living room, which was also the sleeping room. In village houses folk sleep on straw mats and blankets on the same spot where they eat their meals.

A quiet fire in the hearth gave me its warm welcome. On the wall above the hearth a small kerosene lamp held by a band of tinsel nailed to the wall cast its dim light over the room. The wall facing the hearth was covered with cupboards, chests, and other wooden, earthen and metallic receptacles in which products were kept. Over the straw mats on either side of the hearth thick woolen blankets were spread. Pillows lay around for cushions.

I had been in this room many times before, but these things never stood out as now. My eye wandered over them, now stopping at a sickle hanging on a peg in the wall, now at the iconostasis near the door from where the old saint kept vigil over the house whose patron he was.

Meanwhile Vanna reached up to close the shutters of the only open window. My eyes quickly ran over her form, but as quickly fell to my lap when she turned. There they stayed lowered, but still furtively followed her movements. She opened a chest and took out a bowl and a pitcher.

When she returned to the fireside where I was seated in one of the corners, she sat directly in front of me and put between us a pitcher of wine and a bowl of cracked walnuts.

"You were so good to come, Radan." She smiled. Every time she said "Radan" I felt something like a wave rushing through me. I could say nothing. With my thumbs I chipped the shell from a walnut and cast the fragments into the fire. They smoked an instant, like burning incense, then flamed up suddenly and died out, reduced to ashes.

"Was it a pair of socks I gave you as my wedding gift, Radan?" She looked at me caressingly with her dark eyes. In reply I bit the kernel of the walnut I had just shelled and chewed at it slowly.

"Why don't you talk to me, Radan? Are you sorry you came? Did your mother force you to come?"

"You gave socks to my father. My mother you gave a bandanna," I finally said without looking at her.

"And to you?"

I took another walnut and fumbled at it with my fingers. Then she rose and sat near me. She leaned forward and with one hand petted my

hair. As she drew her hand away she touched my cheek. I did not feel like weeping, and yet I was like a person ready to burst out with tears.

"A handsome boy you are, Radan!" She always said "Radan" at the end of the sentence. My father and mother always said "Radan" first and then said what they had to say.

"I say, a handsome boy you are, Radan! Happy the girl that's to be your bride! So I gave you no wedding gift. Then I shall knit you a beautiful pair of socks. Your bride will not knit you more beautiful socks."

My eyes now rested on the wine pitcher and I was about to reach for it when she suddenly said, "Drink some wine, Radan! You are not drinking wine! Does your father allow you to drink wine at home?"

"My father allows me to do what I please!" And I lifted the wine jug, but after one gulp put it back.

"Of course you can do as you please, Radan. You are almost a man. How old are you, Radan?"

"Ten."

"My! You soon will be looking for a bride."

A log in the hearth crackled, like an old man coughing, and a spark leaped out, to expire the instant it fell on the hearth-stone.

Vanna rose and reached for a basket on the mantelpiece. As she sat near me again she took out a reel of yarn from the basket.

"This is for the socks I am going to knit for you, Radan. Will you help me wind it in a ball?"

Knowing my function in the operation, I extended my arms and she fitted the reel around my wrists. Then she picked one end of the thread and began to weave it around a piece of corn-cob.

"Have you a sweetheart, Radan?"

The thread slipped and spun, swirled before my eyes and twined on the growing knot.

"You are far too modest, Radan. Do tell me, will you marry a girl from your own village or will you go beyond the Vardar like your cousin Todor? And do you think I am beautiful, Radan?"

For an instant it seemed to me that the yarn reversed its motion, that it unfurled from the skein and spun back around my wrists.

"Oh, so you don't think I am beautiful! And you are going to marry a girl from your own village!"

Now I felt as if my own body were tossed like a ball in the air and

around it whirled immense quantities of thread, spinning, enmeshing me. I felt weak suddenly and my arms dropped involuntarily to my lap, the band of yarn still on them, but loose.

Vanna raised the wine pitcher to my lips. The refreshing liquid quickly spread its magic tonic through my body and I felt better, feeling emboldened even, so that I could look at the woman, and talk to her. But when she resumed her questioning I still found nothing to say and could only fumble clumsily.

Again I lifted my arms and the reel of yarn stretched on my wrists. The ball, held between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand, rotated in the air and the thread spun around it. With every strand that unraveled from the loop around my wrists and spooled on the skein I felt lighter and freer, as if every strand thus unraveled was an iron shackle which had been removed from my wrists.

The last loop of yarn unrolled from my wrists. It curled and glided quickly over the hearth-stone, slipping away like the tail of a snake disappearing into a hole.

I stretched my arms and yawned. Vanna was replacing the basket on the shelf above the mantelpiece.

"You are tired, Radantcho. It's time to go to sleep," she said casually. And then just as casually added, "Do you want to sleep on this side with me or on the other side by yourself?"

The thought of whether I would sleep with her under the same cover, or alone, had been in my head all through the evening. A dozen times I saw myself panting in her embrace, her loving hands petting my hair and cheeks. And as many times I imagined myself crouched like a dog by the door to guard her as the dragon guards the folk-tale princess imprisoned in the rocky cave.

But now I felt sick at heart. And I had nothing to say. My eyes wandered toward the hearth, where the fire had burnt out, one lone surviving log letting out an occasional crackle. Gray ashes had coated the charcoals that glowed when I came into the room. Above the fireside, the petal-like flame of the petrol lamp had wilted, flickering a pale light over the room. In the dim iconostasis by the door the old saint stood in shadow. Perfect calm reigned in the room. Only, I felt like a child that had broken its favorite magic toy; and I wanted to go home to sleep with my mother.

ROADSIDE INCIDENT

by

Evan Evans

THE man and the woman stood on a strip of gravel close to the concrete pavement. Flat and broad and momentarily empty of traffic, the Dunes Highway ran into the west, cutting through the sprawling hummocks of scrub oak and sand that spread off on both sides. Overhead the red-winged blackbirds wavered on the electric wires, crying shrilly.

The man was dressed in a dark suit and cap, without tie or collar, and his legs were slapped with dust up to his knees. The woman, taller and bigger-framed, wore a long coat of some cheap tweedy material and a black straw hat with pink flowers at the side. Their faces were vacuous with waiting.

The traffic began again. From both directions came the cars, clustered together in meaningless queues, looming suddenly on the man and the woman with a shattering roar, and disappearing with the hissing hum of their tires on the concrete. As the cars from the east approached, the man raised his hand and pointed westward. But no car stopped.

The woman stood looking away from the road. She was facing a sign painted with crude red letters: 5 MILES TO MIKE'S PLACE—HOT DOGS AND GASOLINE—TOURISTS' COMFORT. But she did not see the sign though she was looking at it.

"I knew 'twould be harder to get a ride with a woman along," she said. "You shoulda come alone, Mart."

The man replied without turning round. "You said that before, and we got three rides already, ain't we? We ain't so far from Chicago now." And he touched his cap to the next two cars. But the drivers ignored him; the machines glinted sharply as they passed, and the wind from the wheels ruffled the gravel pebbles.

It was an afternoon in early Fall and the sun hung over a pallid haze in the west. There were shadows in the hollows between the sand hummocks, and an occasional breeze rattled the dry oak leaves.

"You getting hungry?" said the man, at length turning to the woman. "We could walk on to a hot dog stand."

"With two dollars between us?" she said, with a sort of listless scorn. "We still gotta eat in Chicago. And we gotta get there first."

"I could do with a smoke, though." The man turned back to the road. "Here comes a truck," he added.

The woman looked into the shadows for a moment and then faced about beside the man. A huge red truck, filling almost half the highway, approached from the east with a slow but steady ponderosity. As it neared them, the woman waved her arm and smiled. The truck passed, the canvas over its cargo flapping wildly, but it ground to a stop down the road. The man and the woman ran after it.

"Want a lift?" the driver called down.

"Yah; thanks," said the man, holding out a hand to help the woman up the high step.

"You get in first," she said.

The truck-driver leaned one elbow on the almost horizontal steering-wheel and watched them climb up. He was large and blond, with rolling shoulders under his leather jacket, and thick, pudgy arms and hands. A fringe of yellow hair curled over his blue shirt where it was open at the neck.

"It's against the rules to take on passengers," he said; "but I don't mind company." He watched the woman lifting her leg at the high step. "Besides, it's the first time I ever picked up a dame hitch-hiker. Going toward Chicago?"

"That's it," said the man. "We waited a long time for a ride."

"Yeah?" said the driver. He swung round and started the truck, which roused like an earthquake.

"It's a lousy racket, driving these tubs in the day-time." The driver turned his face close to the man's. "I'm usually on the night shift, but they had to get this bus from Detroit to Chicago in a hurry. Night-times you can make some speed. That is, if you don't get sleepy. But I just pull over to the side of the road and take a snooze if I feel one coming on. Damned dangerous if you don't."

"Yah," said the man.

The driver looked at the woman, but she had not heard his speech. He turned back to the road.

The truck had achieved a steady, lumbering speed and seemed to be moving forward on its own momentum. Little cars skirted around it or tried

to obstruct its progress; occasionally it had to veer slowly from its course like some marine monster; but that roll forward was irresistible. The woman slumped exhausted against the wooden seat-back, her large bony hands relaxed over her cracked patent-leather handbag. The driver's thick fingers, too, rested inertly on the steering-wheel. Only the man's small brown hands fidgeted anxiously in his lap. But at last he was quiet also, lulled by the monotonous vibrations of the truck.

From time to time the driver looked at the man and at the woman, turning his narrow blue eyes from one to the other in obvious curiosity. At length he said, "Traveling for pleasure or profit?"

The man had not been asleep but he sat up quickly. "What? Oh, not so much of either, so far. We're looking for work. Maybe we'll get some in Chicago. We gotta get some pretty soon."

"Pretty tough, ain't it?" said the driver. "My old man's been laid off since—well, let's see, since two years ago this winter. And he was a foreman, too. But he got laid off. What's your line?"

"I used to work in a jewelry store," the man said. "Back in Pennsylvania, that was. Then we come on to Cleveland. But we gotta go on. Well, I worked in a restaurant for a while, and then I tried selling; but that ain't any good now." The small brown hands began to fidget again. "But we gotta find something pretty soon."

"She work?" asked the driver.

"Oh yah."

The woman sat up from the wooden seat-back. "Stop that," she said to the man, looking at his hands. The hands dropped between his knees.

"You haven't got a smoke on you, have you?" the man asked the driver.

The latter fumbled in his shirt pocket and drew out a flat yellow package. He pressed it between his fingers. "All out," he said. "Guess I'll have to get some." He paused for a moment. "Say, how long since you two ate? I could stand a hot dog myself."

The man and the woman said nothing. The driver slowed the speed of the truck, and when he saw a low stucco building with a screened porch, he put on the brakes. The truck settled to a stop a few rods beyond the building.

"You can get some stuff over there," the driver said to the man. "Go get us some hot dogs, will you? Bring plenty. And a pack of Camels. Here," he handed the man a half-dollar. The man looked at the woman and then clambered out. "Mustard on mine," said the driver after him.

When he had gone, the driver looked into the face of the woman.

The sun was sinking into a red gloom in the west; it cast a pink light over the woman in the truck. Her face was broad, with hard, prominent features; her eye-brows had once been plucked and had grown out again raggedly. But in the pink light there was a certain delicacy about her fair skin.

"That guy your husband?" said the driver.

"Sure," she answered.

"Oh yeah?" He moved closer to her on the seat. "Where's the wedding ring?"

She returned his stare indifferently. "We pawned that," she said. "Long ago—back in Cleveland. I even lost the claim check."

"Listen, baby," said the driver. He leaned forward and dropped his thick hand casually on her knee. She did not move. "I got an idea. You look to me as if you could use some dough and some feed, and maybe some new duds. Ever think of your looks? You ain't bad-lookin', baby. How about ditching the little bird, and come on with me to Chi? I got a room in a hotel—" He paused and looked up at her face.

She was staring ahead into the sunset. When he stopped speaking, she turned her face toward him, her eyes expressionless. "And after it's all over, then what?" she said.

"Say, they shoot people in Chicago for worrying," said the driver. "Ain't you ever heard?" His hard fingers pushed under the fold of her coat. She grasped his hand and pushed it back: her hands were strong too. But her face showed no emotion.

"You need a shave," she said.

"Aw, what's a few whiskers between sweethearts?" he said, holding her hand tightly. "But they'll come off; they're funny that way. Now listen." He lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. "I got this idea. You ditch this bird and come on with me. He know anything about automobiles?"

"No," said the woman.

"Then it's a cinch. Look, I'll make believe there's something fluey with the motor and I'll have to fix it. See? Then when I'm tinkering with it, you take a stroll, sort of. You ditch him! Then when I honk the horn twice—" he punched the button, and the horn emitted a flat, penetrating note—"like that, see, only twice, then you run like hell to the truck and we'll be on our little joy-ride. What d'you say?" He reached his hand under her coat collar and along the ridge of her shoulder.

Her voice was still colorless. "Look out; he'll be comin'. You wanta get killed?"

"Huh! What about this little idea of mine?"

"Maybe," said the woman.

The man ran out of the low building and down the road to the big truck. "You honk the horn for me?" he said.

"Naw," said the driver, sinking back against the steering-wheel. "You musta heard something else, buddy. Come on in." The woman moved over nearer the driver.

The man noted the change in position, but he climbed up to the outer edge of the seat, holding up a brown paper bag in one hand. "Two hot dogs apiece, and a package of smokes, and a nickel change," he said. They ate voraciously, bolting the large chunks of soggy roll and weiner. The pink glare was fading in the west, and the faces of the man and woman and driver looked pinched and shrunken against the dull vastness of the truck.

The driver was the last one finished. When he had wiped his fingers flatly on his thighs, he tore open the package of cigarettes and passed them.

"That's better," he said. "Now we can get on to Chi." He jammed his foot on the starter without turning on the ignition. The truck growled and shook in slow, up-struggling waves; then was silent. He pulled the "choker." Again the engine heaved, and there was the thick smell of gasoline.

"Stuck!" said the driver. "That damned carburetor. She was acting up this morning." He swung himself out with heavy agility and tugged at the hood.

"Can I help?" the man asked. The woman looked on indifferently.

The driver got the hood up and stuck his head down under it. When he drew back, he held up a hand dripping with gasoline. "Look at that! I gotta clean the damn thing out. Takes about half an hour. If you wanta amuse yourselves—" He stopped and looked up at them, his narrow blue eyes shutting down on his expression.

The woman turned to the man. "Let's walk over to the lake," she said.

"Sure," said the driver. "It ain't far to the lake. And it's real purty. Go on, and come back in about a half an hour. I'll wait for ya." He bent low over the hood again.

The man and the woman found a broken path through the rustling oaks and dust-coated vines and bushes, which showed white in the shadows. They had to walk carefully around a marsh full of erect cat-tails and the thin chirp-

ing of frogs. At last they climbed a sandy hillock, patched with low shrubs, and came in view of the lake.

"Let's sit down here," said the man, squatting on a slope of sand. He put his elbows on his knees and dropped his head on his arms.

The woman stood for a moment, looking at the scene. Stretching far before her, Lake Michigan lay pale and flat, neutral-toned, reflecting the empty sky. Somewhere to the left a smoky transparency lifted: that was Chicago. She hugged her coat about her and sank down on the brown sand; it was warmer nearer the earth.

When the man raised his head, the woman could see the crumpled profile of his chin and neck below his cap. "Look," she said. "You better take the two dollars. It's safer with you." And she lifted the flap of the handbag.

The man's eyes were dark and deep in the twilight. "You ain't scared, are you?" he said.

"Me scared?" she said harshly. "Scared of what?"

"Oh, nothing," he said. Then he began to talk rapidly. "Scared of goin' on and on like this. Or maybe being separated, you from me, or me from you. Or supposing one of us should die. You ain't afraid of that, are you?" He rose to his knees beside her. "You ain't afraid of dying, are you?"

The woman looked at him obscurely. "You getting soft in the head?" she said.

He leaned over her quickly and his two small hands gripped her throat under the coat collar. The woman trembled slightly but did not resist. Her throat was warm under his hands; he could feel the little bones and cords in her neck, and the full leaping pulse of her blood under the soft skin.

"Mart!" she gasped hoarsely.

His head fell against the rough tweedy cloth. "I can't go on," he said. "It ain't no use, just like it never was any use. What's there in Chicago, any more than there was in Cleveland or Pittsburgh? What's there anywheres? And how're we going to live on two dollars?" His arms hung heavily over her shoulders, and his head slipped down along her breast.

The woman pressed her hands against her throbbing throat; then she took off the man's cap and smoothed his hair back softly.

"Never mind," she said. "We're still alive, ain't we? Things have got to get better some day. Sure, they have. There must be jobs in Chicago. Why, it's a big city, Mart—bigger'n Cleveland or Pittsburgh; bigger'n anything we

by Evan Evans

ever seen. There must be jobs there." She rested her cheek on the side of his head.

The cracked patent-leather handbag had slid from the woman's knees and lay sprawling on the sand beside the man's cap. It was growing darker. Suddenly across the misty dunes two hollow, penetrating horn notes sounded, far away.

The man started up wildly. "That must be the truck," he cried. "We gotta hurry."

The woman drew the man's cheek around so that his mouth was close to hers. "Let it go," she whispered. "Let it go. We can get another ride."

The horn notes sounded at intervals for several minutes, and then no more.

THE BELLS

by

Arnold Paine

"MORNIN'!" Uncle Sammy said, after politely taking his pipe from his mouth. He fixed his bright, pale eyes on withered Mrs. Caldwell, hearing her protestations of the niceness of the morning, but saying to himself that she was getting old, she warn't what she used to be. "Well, I dunno," he remarked in courteous dissent, cautiously hinting at his doubt of the morning's niceness to be, "I dunno, Miz Caldwell." He rattled a light tin pail on its thin bail of wire. "Reckon I mought git a few berries, *however!*"

With that elegant conclusion he winked, and aimed his pipestem at Mrs. Caldwell. Energetically he pushed the stem's rubber bit between his bearded lips, and it found its way to the usual resting place between what Uncle Sammy called his "gooms." Smoke, bluer than that hazy morning in August, and more pungent by far, streamed on his easy breath through the brown stain across his great square-cut beard. He shook his head kindly at Mrs. Caldwell and went on his way up Indian Harbor's main road. The dust was still laid by dew.

At this time of day Uncle Sammy was often to be found at the general store. Having breakfasted well, he would sit against the long counter inside, or outside on the long porch, gently belching. A great cat crouched at his feet. Now and then his active, eighty-three-year mind would give out words of wit as broad as the lower harbor under the rising sun, words of scorn as sharp as the great cat's claws which were frequently exercised on a worn corner post hard by, words of wisdom as deep as the ledges upon which Indian Harbor was built. He was apt also, in the forenoon and afternoon and evening alike, to become somnolent, with the great cat blinking on guard.

This morning, however, he was going inland for blueberries. He turned off the main road into an ancient, seldom-used lane where he shambled after his shadow; in the long dewy grass the thick leather of his shoes wetly glis-

tened. He glanced up at the faintly-bending tree tops, and from a clearing looked back to the sun, the sea, and the hazy horizon:

"I gorry, it's a day for wanderin' ashore."

He expected fog, late in the forenoon.

At the end of the lane lay the remote, happily-neglected, pine-girt graveyard, where he had selected a fine plot against the day when he should join his proper contemporaries under the stones.

"Not this year, no sir, not this year by a long shot. I hain't come up this way for to look over my plot, nor the old stones neither. They's planty o' time for that. This mornin'—all I want is a pail o' berries. An' by the Lord God, I know where to find 'em! I know where they's old Christers o' berries."

And along an old trail Uncle Sammy shambled away, his two-quart pail swinging from a brown hand, a brown thumb hooked into a soiled suspender strap, and his pipe—not a corncob but a twenty-five cent "real briar"—drawing "nice an' strong." He felt extraordinarily content, through scrub and dark wood and jagged bright clearing.

"I don't feel no more'n a child this mornin'. Reckon I could jump right onto my shadder if I wantid—"

Watchful for sparks, he knocked out his pipe carefully and put it away. He felt very young as he popped a wintergreen leaf into his mouth for mumbling between his gums. The subtly clean flavor reminded him, as nothing else could, of the days when as a boy he had "gone squirrelin" with a long and heavy muzzle loader. In a wintergreen leaf he found nature concentrated: her restraint and excess, her heat and cold, rain and drought, sun and shade—her wonderful resilience.

Presently he plucked a bunchberry and carefully fixed it, bright red and fresh green, against his soiled suspender strap and faded blue shirt. So! Affection gleamed in his down-turned, faded blue eyes. A bunchberry was a pretty thing. Its knobby blossom reminded him, too, that in a few weeks there would be "bake applin' " on the Heath.

At last the trail dwindled and disappeared at Hammond's clearing, the first of several adjacent ones. He stepped from quiet shade into the warm, murmurous open. A woodchuck lumbered away. Gnats whirled in rapid convolution. A silken thread drifted out into the sunny haze.

"They ain't so plentiful this year. She needs burnin' over. She ain't so poor, *however!* Lord God! Blue as the water! Look at them berries!"

His thumb released the suspender strap; from the crook of his arm he

took his old sweater, spread it on the ground, and sat down. With thick, selective fingers he began to pick the choicest blueberries. They thumped softly into the bottom of the pail.

"The minister—he told me what a fisherman writ in his book in the old days: he writ that God, if he wantid, mought ha' made a better berry—that was concernin' strawberries—but seems to him God never did think fit to improve on it. Strawberries *are* mighty good, but I reckon that fisherman never et a blueberry. God couldn't ha' done better than a blueberry, no sir! while he was makin' wild fruits to grow."

Uncle Sammy picked more slowly, examining the clustered berries and removing the largest with tremulous care. He was berrying only for his own pleasure. He pushed his weathered hat up over his shining-domed forehead. The sun, casting his shadow before him and edging it with pale gold, gently warmed his back. He would take as much comfort as the sun would afford, because he knew obscurely that it couldn't last through the forenoon.

He moved to another clump, spread out his sweater, eased himself to the ground, and this time took off his hat and laid it beside him, crown down:

"They ain't so many great berries over here; but now I'm set down I mought git what I can. Mebbe I'll cover the bottom, then I mought look up yonder.

"Hark now to that white-throatid sparrow! Hark! Lord God! he sings fit to bust hisself, he's that full o' the mornin'."

And Uncle Sammy went from clump to clump, from clearing to clearing. As the berries mounded higher in his tin pail the sun wheeled behind him, and he noticed without apprehension that it was being slowly obscured. The air had cooled perceptibly, but the ground was now dry. So he shook out his old brown sweater and put it on:

"They's no sense in hurryin'."

He sat down again and picked with elaborate care.

"Them's mammoth big berries, the hull lot of 'em!"

And presently he had the pail three-quarters full. He was admiring them when his shadow, which had been long fading, suddenly gathered itself up and vanished—leaving a vague sense of dispossession. Uncle Sammy got up and faced about, as if surprised:

"I gorry! there's the sun gone! Well, I'll git back to Hammond's clearin' an' git my bearin's an' have my lunch. Yes, I'm a little mite hungry now. Down

that way an' straight through to Hammond's clearin'. I'll find my trail; I'll set right down on it an' have lunch.

"Hark! Hark to that little white-throatid feller! Jest drawin' a little breath o' fog—he sings glory halleluyer. Hark to t'other one!"

But as Uncle Sammy hearkened to the invisible birds, turning from one to the other as they piped note for note, fog thickly invaded the clearings and swiftly captured all things within them. The birds sang no longer.

"Which way was I headin'? Mought be that way—but no, it do'n't look right. Mought be down this way. I gorry, that fog makes everythin' look 'bout the same. Now, they ain't no sense to this!"

Uncle Sammy chuckled craftily to himself. It was simple as daylight. Coming from Hammond's clearing, he had noted various landmarks such as a great anthill, a granite boulder of curious shape, a thin belt of hackmatack, a blazed pine, the line of an old fence, an unusually symmetrical growth of cedar. He remembered them well, and their sequence.

Under the fog many looming shapes seemed to be his landmarks until, closing happily upon them, he found them utterly strange. Every animate and inanimate thing looked from a short distance like all others of its kind. Once he was sure as guns that he was right on top of Hammond's clearing: fortune perversely led him to three remembered landmarks in the right order, but then he felt the ground rising instead of falling, and there was no old hellion of an anthill where it should be by his reckoning.

He began to remember things that he hadn't seen; their identity in time and place seemed wonderfully self-evident. They led him farther astray. And he was baffled but not frightened:

"By the Lord God! they ain't no use huntin' for Hammond's clearin'. I mought be walking round in it right now. I'd best strike for the woods an' follow 'em round; they won't be a chanct o' missin' the trail down home—no sir!"

During the next hour, Uncle Sammy might have scouted Hammond's clearing several times, or for all he knew he hadn't come with stone's throw. He marched stoutly in vague, fog-bound rings and squares, and persuaded himself that he was eliminating the clearings one by one: he must hit upon Hammond's before long. Yet, in the clearest daylight, there was little to distinguish what Hammond had cleared from what others had cleared. This thought caused Uncle Sammy to distrust his memory; he would not admit having passed that cedar, that ancient blazed pine. No sir, he hadn't never

laid eyes on them. Presently he gave up this second method, feeling remarkably puzzled and downright tired:

"I gorry! I want a bite o' lunch—I'm a little mite hungry, I am!"

He put down carefully the pail of berries, and sat down beside them in the fog. From a bulging pocket in his shirt he pulled a compressed package of sandwiches. He wasn't hungry at all, but he needed the comfort of something familiar, the comfort of his bread and butter and own gooseberry preserve. He ate fast and without pleasure. But after he had neatly folded up the brown paper and returned it to the pocket, and had filled his pipe and lit up, he felt better. The strong plug and the taste of gooseberry mingled pleasantly in his long throat. The pipe bowl warmed his broad enclosing palm:

"Well now, I mought jest as well hit right out through the woods. These woods is bounden north by Gouldsboro Ro'd, east by East Bay Ro'd, south by the Pond Ro'd, an' west by the new highway. Here is your Uncle Sammy right in the middle, an' it's ag'in natur' if he do'n't strike one o' them ro'ds pretty so'on."

Again he spat copiously on the match, just to make sure he wasn't leaving fire behind him, and flung it away. He crooked two fingers under the bail of his berry pail, and got up. Smoke streamed bravely from the stained area in his thick, foggy beard. He pulled down his hat, gave a hitch to his trousers, snuggled his lean shoulders closer into his old sweater, and started off into the woods.

If the tree tops hadn't been swathed in fog he could have directed himself by their preponderant bend from the northwest. The slow drift of the fog might help a little. The fog horn at Petit Manan was too far distant, he knew, to give him even a deceptive hint of direction. But by sighting a line, tree by tree through the dull greyness, he hoped to walk straight. . . .

His easy shambling gait had stiffened and lengthened into rigid, mechanical striding. He held himself painfully erect, a rigorous two inches added to his frame. He was heedless of the rough going, of stones and roots and tangled brush underfoot, of the whip of bare limbs and the slapping of fog-soaked branches. The color drained from the tightened skin over his outstanding cheekbones; it faded into the whiteness of his beard. He wrenched once at the tieless shirt collar and tore it open. But he clung to his pail of mammoth big berries, and his gooms were set aching on the pipestem. Thus he strode for two hours perhaps, wearied by the rigid monotony but unable to halt. . . .

"Bells! Hark to them bells! Hark—hark! They's somebody lost from the village, an' they're a-tollin' for him. Bang! Hark to them guns now! They're a-firin'. Funny, ain't it, how them loud sounds git lost out there—the fog drinks 'em up like it was cotton wool takin' a drop o' water.

"Fire again, boys! Lo'd up an' fire! So! One two! Let the poor feller know you're a-lookin' for him. Give him somethin' to bear on, somethin' to lead him out o' the woods. Lay onto the rope an' make that bell up there give tongue, make her speak out.

"That's my old muzzle lo'der. That's Billy—he took down my muzzle lo'der; ye can hear him squirrelin' in the woods yonder. Bang! Lord God! ye ca'n't hardly mistake that old gun, she roars so, but she fires wonderful straight.

"No, no—that bell there—I'll come close round the buoy. Lord God! my arms is half out o' sockit, an' this bo't's solid with fish, an' three mile to pull yet. Ye ca'n't see your own nose for the fog; ye ca'n't see how all-fired far ye've got to row home. Three mile now. There—she's ringin' astern. Lord God A'mighty, why do'n't the wind ever blow for a sprits'l when a man's late comin' home with a fine lo'd o' fish. . . .

"No—that bell's tollin'—they're bringin' back Henry Stewart. Yes ma'am, that was the night the *Portland* went down. I was on a fisherman, an' lashed to the wheel all night, ma'am. No—ye're right, I don't go to sea no more, 'cept offshore for a little hand-linin' in my peapod. Yes ma'am, it *is* a hard life. They do'n't pay nothin' for fish, nowadays, nothin' at all hardly.

"That bell—callin' in the scholars. I hain't got my lesson. No—no—tain't either—that's the fog bell o' Ned's old schooner. She's comin' up the harbor. No—no—tain't that neither. I dunno what that bell belongs to. Makes me feel kind o' dizzy, kind o' queer like to hear it tollin' that way, steady an' solemn. . . ."

"Hi! Uncle Sammy—hi there!"

A lean boy stepped quietly out of the fog, as it were, and plunged into it after the stalking, unhearing old man. The boy didn't seem surprised at Uncle Sammy's apparent indifference. He had gone searching before; and this, he knew, was "the way they acted." So he followed closely, and while calling gently "Hi, Uncle Sammy—hi!" he broke open his shotgun, drew out the shell, and pocketed it. The boy closed upon him, still calling gently "Hi, Uncle Sammy—hi!" Then he caught the old man firmly by one shoulder.

Uncle Sammy spun round; a shudder wrenched his spare frame, and he shrank then to his normal stature.

"Hi, Uncle Sammy!"

"Hi," he answered vaguely, fighting for his memory. "Bit thick, ain't it?"

"Where've you been goin' all this time?" the boy asked gravely.

They stepped together from a dark, fog-filled wood into a white, fog-filled road. Uncle Sammy, putting on a manner of knowing where they were going, shrewdly replied:

"Why, I heard a lot o' bell-ringin' an' firin' down here. Is somebody lost in the woods? Pretty thick in there. I was berryin' all forenoon, up Hammond's clearin' way."

"So I heard. Well, we found him," the boy grinned.

"Well now," Uncle Sammy protested indignantly, "why do'n't they stop wastin' powder, an' wearin' out them bells? I gorry! I'm tired of it!"

"I'll let 'em know," the boy said quietly. He got out his shells and fired thrice into the air. The church bells and searching guns were silenced. Uncle Sammy was silenced too, but not for long.

"Phil," he counselled, "jest look into my pail if ye'd like to see some mammoth berries. Ain't they old Christers o' berries, hey? Jest look at that old hellion!" He selected one and held it, between bark-stained thumb and finger, against the clean white fog. "I gorry, it's big as the ball I used for lo'ding up my great muzzle lo'der, when I was 'bout your size."

"Damn near," the boy agreed, looking with admiration not up at the dark, perfect blueberry, but sideways at shambling, enthusiastic Uncle Sammy.

ETCHED IN STEEL

by

Lyford Moore

WHEN the *Sandmaster* passed us, Greg jumped over to my boat. The deck was soaked with mist so he slipped on it and juggled a minute over the muddy river, but then he straightened up and came onto the bridge for a talk.

"Detroit again, huh, Pete?" he said, waving toward its rough outlines ahead with the glasses he was wiping.

"Yeah," I said, "two nights in a decent bed, then we go up the river again."

"Alone?"

"Think I'm going to paddle this scow upstream myself?" I asked.

"Naw, I mean alone in bed," Greg said.

"Hell, no!" I answered. "I been off them a dam' long time, and I'm going to get a woman this trip even if it has to be a Saint Antoine Street coon. I'm still a sailor," I said, "even if I do only sail this puddle."

"You lucky bastard!" he said, real angry. "We leave in a couple of hours to go up to Saginaw again."

"So Skipper was telling me; says you'll be gone three months," I said, kidding him.

"Only three months?" asked Greg, kidding back. "I heard we was going up for a half year and hunt moose."

I waved at a police boat that went by, but I couldn't see who was running it—it was all red and green lights in the fog. The damned fog broke into everything that night. Because of all that was to come up I've a good picture of it, and everything else, in my head still.

Our boats had got back to Detroit that night from a week's trip getting Zug Island sand down from up state. The Greyson Steel Company was enlarging its place, and we were trying to fill in a dirty swamp they needed,

but we still had a lot to do. It took about a year to fill from the mills to the river.

Greg and I stayed leaning on the rail of my sand-sucker, watching it pull in and talking. We got in about eleven and stopped at the Greyson's shaky dock. All around were fly-covered lights and shadowed reeds on the river bank. It was late in summer, and that night the water in the air kept the heat down low. Across the pipe for the sand and over the watery swamp and sand fills I could see the Greyson mills about a half mile off. The city was way past it and bent around by the shore. The mills were quiet now except for number four furnace, which was fired, and the mist and the distance hushed it pretty well too. Over its stack a yellow flame played up to about six feet. Now and then I broke the hot quiet with an order to somebody below, but mostly Greg and I talked low. Off in the city I could see the red neon light on the Penobscott building, but that night the moon and the mist made it different and made it and the cold steel seem out of place. Only people could feel it. A couple of Feds were at the dock to check us for liquor, but the mist and *MayBelle's* wake splashing the shore muffled their yells, and we went on talking. I felt I didn't want the officers or the smoky city they came from around me that night. I just wanted to get away from the steel and have a woman.

Because the *Sandmaster* was leaving so soon it tied up first at the sand line, and a couple of men jumped off her to fasten their hose so they could empty. Down in the swamp a door opened for a second, and a woman's body was blacked in front of the white inside her house. We heard the slam of the door closing, and the black ate her house again. It was too hot even to wish I lived there with her then.

"Rinnert's place." Gregg nodded at the house which was stuck on a high spot in the swamp. "He'll be back early tomorrow. I hope for his sake she's alone. She seems to take anyone, huh, Pete?"

"Yeah," I said, "Cooper had her before last trip. I guess women live for it though, so why the hell shouldn't she? I'd do it, too, if I lived that close to the steel."

"Why, I don't care,—Christ!" said Greg. "Only she's a good looker and Rinnert's a pal." He laughed at me. "You want a woman so bad, why don't you grab her? It's easy."

"For anybody but me," I answered back. "She won't take me. She must think I'm too little." I was twenty then, and Coop was big and about forty.

"Naw," I said, "I tried it once down at the restaurant and drew a blank. She's out."

They started the *Sandmaster's* pumps. Her wet sand shot down the pipe line into the swamp, and her pumps hummed loud, so I had to talk louder.

"You can't blame her," I said. "She's hot as the devil naturally and Joe's away most of the time. What'd he expect anyhow—a virgin? Hell!" I went on, "She had the same start as the rest of us—dumb teachers and games in the alleys and skating on the sidewalks till dark and then sneak off with some boy. Her folks are Russians; they never taught her better."

"Well, there she is," said Greg, ending my talk for me. "Go ahead, cut it on the graft if you can. I won't tell Joe."

"Great God," he said suddenly, looking at the *Sandmaster*, "my tub's half outa water already. I better get over and see they suck the corners." He went off, but he turned around again. "Pete," he said, "see if you can pick me up a pair of good dice while you're in town—set for sevens and nines."

"What the hell," I shouted over the racket of the pumps, "don't bad gin get rid of you quick enough?"

"Naw," he said, "there's a dago baby in Bay City with a pad-roll. He milked me for thirty-three bucks last week."

"You be damn sure you pay me back!" I called.

I stayed on deck for a while, watching the dark get darker. The moon got higher and the reeds swayed some, so it was pretty. I wished Mrs. Rinnert was on deck with me, but then I had to go down and show the Feds over *MayBelle*. I got all this done as quick as possible and then looked over the hatches and smoked a butt with Olsen, the mate. The pumps got on my nerves, so I put my stuff together and climbed off the boat. Olsen came out on deck again when I was leaving.

"Back soon, Pete?" he asked.

"Oh, I forgot," I yelled. "Meant to ask you to put *MayBelle* to bed for me—I'm too damn tired. I'll get my report out over at the shack."

"Well, goddam you!" Olsen called back, "whose tub is this anyhow?" Then I was too far away to hear him.

I climbed the bank and crossed over to the sand line and walked on it toward my shack. Pretty soon I could see Rinnert's house at my side. She had the windows up and a light in the front room, but I didn't see her. It was a good thing, the way I felt, because I'd have climbed in, if I'd had nerve enough. But there wasn't any noise coming from the house anyhow, not over

the hum of the damn pumps, so I went on. I looked back again and only saw a couple of sheets of white where the windows were; that's how thick it was.

The flame from the mill stack kept getting brighter, and its color was reflected on the pipe I was walking. All that night the flame and the neon both were easy to see, even though it was misty. The pipe, that the mist had made slippery, kept jerking under me, and I had a hard time keeping on. After while I came to the end of it where the sand was pouring into the swamp, and I switched over from the pipe to the path on the sand fills. When I got to the temporary side-track that goes to the mills I had to wait while some slow flat-cars loaded with pig rolled past. They were going up to where they would be emptied, then they would be coasted back down to the main line again. There were always some blocking my way when I came over the fills. They didn't make much noise, and the moon made them throw real faint, funny shadows on the sand at my feet. The sand roaring out the end of the pipe cut off what little racket they did make, and, except for the shadows and the fog that their moving fanned at me, they didn't seem to be going. I thought of Rinnert's wife standing at her door and I felt lonely waiting there. Then the cars went by, and I walked on. It was easier walking the path on the sand fills, but my feet stuck in the damp stuff and blurbed when I pulled them out.

Pretty soon I got to our bunch of shacks by the mills and went to mine. I unpacked my good suit, put on some slippers, and tried to work. I couldn't though, in the heat, and my mind kept seeing Mrs. Rinnert as she'd been at the restaurant last trip down—pretty, in a dark sort of foreign way, heavy lips, and old enough and tall. I sat thinking and stared out at the Penobscott light till I heard a few shouts far away and a whistle as Greg's *Sandmaster* pulled out.

I started wondering how she would look lying naked on a bed, and I could almost touch her white breasts and full legs, I saw them so plain. Then the red and green lit police boat started floating over her, and I tried to work again. I heard talk about booze and some louder shouts from out on the fills, and pretty soon my gang came by.

"Thought you was so tired, you son-of-a-bitch!" shouted Olsen, coming over to my door which I had left open.

"Why, go to hell!" I said back, "I'll get her out for you when we go."

"Damn right you will!" he said, and went on. Then he called back, "I left the pumps on like you said, you big stiff!"

I went on thinking how I'd like to take Mrs. Rinnert up to Escanaba with me next trip, and then I made myself get at my job again. I was still writing the report when she came along, and I didn't hear her till she was just outside.

I heard her call, "Peter!" and looked out my window.

She was standing in the line of light, and I could see her wet face staring at me. She had on some dark, red-colored dress, and her hair was undone and reached down about to her armpits. She was wide awake and beautiful and sort of nervous. Behind her the neon light showed and the fog made it a red kind of halo over her head. Altogether she looked sort of queer, but she looked just right for that night.

"Peter," she said, "has your gang all gone?" She seemed a little scared and was talking in a whisper. I nodded my head, and in a minute she was in my room, and I was staring back at her. I think I must have shook a little she was so pretty. I guess she'd picked up my name from somebody at the restaurant.

"Cops gone yet?" she asked in a tired voice, while she sat down on the edge of my bed.

I couldn't talk for awhile I was so surprised, but then I told her they'd gone long ago. I talked rough till I could get my balance again. I wondered why she'd come and hoped like hell I knew why.

"Did they find your whiskee?" she asked, pronouncing the "skee" part funny.

"No," I said, "Skipper always sticks it away good."

"Peter," she said next, "could you get me a bottle of it? My husband's coming back soon, and he'll fix you for it later. I can't sleep in this lousy heat without something."

Then I knew she didn't want me, but—hell! I'd have done whatever she wanted that night, so I said, "Sure, I'll fix you up. Come with me?" I asked. I'd gotten my style back by then.

"I would," she said, "but isn't the river bank awful wet?"

"That's all right," I said, planning. "Just wait till I put on my shoes."

She talked while I put them on. "I saw you come in awhile back," she said. "Then I heard your guys come past. I had to wait till everybody was gone, because Joe wouldn't want me running around this late. He comes in tomorrow, and then you can pay Skipper back. Ain't this heat terrible, and the pumps?"

I said something, and she went on talking. I stared at her all the time,

and wondered why I didn't like her more, because she was a good looking skirt. I guess nobody goes crazy over a woman that's free for anyone. I just wanted her and pitied her a little. When she sat all bunched up looking at me her dress slipped some, and I could see a dark sort of valley between her breasts, and I decided I'd get her that night or break my neck. I stood up and growled, "Come on," and walked out in front of her.

I looked back, and there she was, running along. She caught up with me a little way from the shack. The light was still red over her head, but her dress had gone black now.

"Don't make a noise, Peter," she said, "or you'll start the booze cops again."

"Don't be dumb," I said. "Rinnert won't be back till morning."

She stopped walking. "You just after that, too?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling a bluff. "No, I just don't want you to stay awake and hot all night. Christ! I don't care if you're Greta Garbo."

She laughed real quietly, and went on, so I knew I'd got a foothold.

We went on over the sand fills. Pretty soon one of those rats around there cut across in front of her. It was big and wet and slimy, so I didn't blame her for getting scared. I ran after it a couple of steps, chasing it, and then went on. I think she liked my kind of defending her.

The little breeze had shifted, and a smell of smoke blew past. It came from over at number four furnace and wasn't so good, but the dark and the moon were nice. About the time we got to the pipe line a Tashmoo excursion boat went by way in front of us on its down river trip. Part of the time it was in sight, and partly it was hidden behind warehouses and docks. It had a couple of lower decks all lighted up bright, and sometimes we could hear the sound of its jazz band over the drone of the pumps, or we'd hear people on it laugh or call out. All the top decks were dark so its passengers could make love, but they must have gotten too wet on top to stay there long. I wished we were on it going up river, and Mrs. Rinnert sighed, so I knew she was thinking the same as I was. We came to the pipe line, and then we were too busy balancing on it to watch the Tashmoo boat.

I walked it in front, and she held my hand to steady herself. It was hard going for awhile, but in a bit the breeze came up some, and the mist lifted a little. This made the moon clearer, and it was good walking then. We could see the puddles in the swamp to both sides plain now. The only thing I didn't

like was that the breeze brought the smell of smoke thicker. I called back to her about it.

"That smoke get in your house much?" I asked, to start off.

"Yes," she said. "That and the pump noise and the sand, too, when it's windy, but mostly the sulphur gas stink from the damn swamp's worst."

She was right; I knew that stink. "Why don't you move on the other side of the mills?" I asked back.

"No, Joe says he don't want to: this here's handy for him," said Mrs. Rinnert. "I tried to get him to last year, but he says you get a better wind on this side in the mornings, and he likes to see what's moving on the river. Hell, though, I told him, you ain't here more'n five nights a month, but he wouldn't listen. So I have to stay." She stopped talking then, and I could hear her patting along behind me. Every so often she'd slip and give a jerk on my arm, and I'd pull her up straight again. I sort of liked that because it made her seem closer. She was one baby who could have made those trips to the Upper Peninsula better if she'd gone on them with me.

When we passed her house she started talking to my back again. "I gotta do those things, Pete," she said. "It ain't often so pretty like tonight, and when the fog's up and the pumps are stopped you hear the roar of the furnaces all night. A man'll make you forget them for awhile anyhow."

"Now the hook," I said, sticking to my line.

"Don't be dirty," she answered. "I don't want you,—it ain't so bad to-night. Your pumps'll stop after while, won't they?"

"About four o'clock," I said. "I had Olsen start them slow tonight, and I'm going to stop them later. Sorry about it."

She just said, "Oh, it's all right."

When we got to the river bank the dock lights were still on, so I told her I better call the watchman and have him shut them off.

"Wait'll we start back," she said. "They make it nicer, except for the flies."

We stood at the river bank for a while. The dock was wooden, and now it was so soaked with water that it shined. The *MayBelle* was pumping at the sand pipe now, where the *Sandmaster* had been. She was all white and shadows under the lights, and she looked good after the swamp. But the pumps were loud, and now an alkali smell, from chemical plants across the river, was in the air with the smoke. I was ready for a drink myself. The river was a little rough, and it shook up the moon reflections on it. It was all peaceful

and nice to look at, but the noise and smells were bad. The city seemed far away beyond us, and it was all put to bed now. There was only she and I, and I'd have grabbed her, but I had to play my cards right.

"I can't go down there, Pete," she said. "It'd spoil my shoes it's so wet. But it's pretty enough from here," she went on. "You can't see these things from my place. Besides, in the day it's all so damn dirty and smoky. But now, God! it's nice. The steel don't seem eating in everything here."

I remembered better and could almost feel the mills around us. Jesus, we were both a part of them just like the pig they used—she a check-up man's wife and me a sand-sucker pilot. I felt sorry for her and wanted to beat out the angry feeling I was getting again. I was thinking how it'd been working in the rolling mill before I got promoted to the *MayBelle*, which they owned. That was like the Greyson, though, to promote you out of steel and onto the river, and then, as soon as you'd got used to the water and the quiet and had worked up to an easy job, promote you back into steel as a foreman. It was supposed to be sort of a vacation.

"Come on," I said quick, "I can carry you down, can't I?"

She laughed. "I wish't you would, if you're strong enough," she said. Then she looked at me, puzzled. "You're a funny guy, Peter," she said.

I saw my holding back was working. I was different for her, gave her something to think about how to win. I didn't like her "strong enough" crack, so I picked her up and started down the bank. She was right; it was slippery. Going down, I stumbled and we both almost fell, but I got her tighter and we went on down.

"See?" she said, way up close. "You better put me down, Peter."

God, but her breath felt good in my ear. I just answered, "Shut up!" and laughed down in my throat. Then she squirmed in my arms, and we were on the dock, and I put her down.

"Thanks," she said. "It's better here. Can I come on board with you?"

"Sure," I answered, starting on up. "Watch the plank, though; it's wet too."

As she came up she put her hand in mine again. It was different than ten minutes ago, though. Men can tell those things right off, and I knew I was going to get my way later. She just held it harder or something, but I knew where I stood. When we got on board we felt the motors down below making the whole boat quiver. I went after the whiskey, and she followed me down.

"Just want to get away from all that back up there for a minute," she said, going down the stairs.

I hunted up a bottle and suggested that we have a drink there on *May-Belle* before we went back, so we went down to my cabin to drink it. She looked over everything I had like a woman will, even on a dinky cabin on a sand-sucker.

"Joe and me don't have anything nice like this; our stuff's all sooty," she said. "He's away so much he don't even know how the damn swamp stinks. I wish't we could have a houseboat, then I could stay up river when he's away, and I wouldn't hear them pumps or all the bums shouting on the docks or the mill roar." She looked at my berth and said, "That's nice, too."

I thought she was hinting at first, but she wasn't; she was just glad to be on the water. "It ain't any of it nice," I answered. "It's a hell of a hole. I'd get out of it all, if I had any dough."

I looked at her quick then, but she didn't show anything, so I knew she wasn't interested in that part of it. I felt real sorry for her then, and I decided to shoot square with her. I didn't like her real well, and I still wanted her bad, but I was thinking of that Tashmoo boat that had gone past us and of the sulphur stink in the swamp and of how pretty she was.

We put down a couple of stiff shots and then went up to the pilot house, after I'd turned off the pumps so she could feel better. She sat down on the long bench up there. It was awfully quiet then with the pumps off, and the boat settled some. We commenced to hear the frogs that had started to croak out in the swamp.

"Thanks for turning them off for me, Pete," she said. "Also for the drinks."

"It's your booze," I answered. "And I'll just have to turn them back on in the morning so's to get emptied and let the *Charles Thompson* in."

"God, it's nice up here," she said. She was watching a big Stapleton freighter, that was going along quiet and dark. I don't think she remembered I was there. "Gee! feel the boat rock," she said, laughing some more.

We could hear the waves slap against the side of *MayBelle*. I wasn't thinking much about all that stuff then, but she was. She talked about how the moon on the water sort of shook with the waves, and about how a couple of auto horns were blowing way off on the land. I just remember her hair was blowing a little, too.

"That's what we're here for," I said, talking of the autos. "Just to help

make things like them, when we should be going down the river forgetting all about them,—like those people!" I pointed off to a little cruiser, flying a Yacht Club flag, that darted past, chugging loud. I knew I didn't really need a cruiser, though. She looked off at it but turned right around and then looked back to the flame from number four furnace awhile.

"You know, Peter," she said, "I sort of forgot—my first name's Olga. I wish't you wouldn't call me Mrs. Rinnert up here."

"All right, Olga," I said, "you're the boss." She liked that too.

I gave her a cigarette. "If you smoke that, it'll get rid of the other smells for a while," I said.

"Thanks," she replied, taking my hand after she had lit up. "You're real nice to me. I guess neither of us would like the Greysons, would we?"

"No, goddam them!" I answered. It made me mad to think of them. I saw now she only wanted to keep on being a person like I did, and I'd have stopped our game if I could have, but she kept pressing my hand, and Christ! but she looked cute and little and dark sprawled out on the bench, also in the back of my head I kept thinking of the steel. "If I could get hold of them, I'd stick steel in them till they couldn't walk straight either!" I said loudly.

"Hell, Pete," she said, "that wouldn't do no good. You can't do things if you're poor—especially if you think about it all much."

The moon was sliding down again now, and it began to streak light through the pilot house. When the light hit the wheel it glanced off the metal parts and dotted the wall at our side. The light and the quiet kept on coming, and the frogs out in the swamp croaked louder and louder. Olga hummed some, but then she stopped to listen to a cricket under the bench. We could hear the reeds sway up and down the river bank. My pictures on the walls didn't look any too good for a woman to see, but I didn't care with her because she'd understand what they meant.

I pointed out to her some constellations I'd learned from our radio man. She said she'd never known about constellations before, and I had to show her over again, her jerking her head about and saying the names over. I also told her how I'd wanted to be a champion swimmer when I was a kid.

"I'm sorry about that part, Peter," she said softly, and she sat over close to me.

"Aw, Christ! that's all over," I answered. "I'll probably get a promotion after while and go back into the mill—be nursemaid to an open hearth till I get too old." I wiped my face off. The windows were up, and every so

often it got wet from a spray of mist coming in, but it felt good on my face, and cool, till it got too wet.

"No, Pete!" Olga cried out so loud she surprised me. "Don't let it get you! Can't you get another job?"

"Nope," I said, "steel's all I know. My old man was a foreman so I grew up in it."

Then I stood up. I said I had to get back and finish that report I'd started a long time ago. She'd made me feel a lot better talking like this and liking the night, but I knew damn well I wasn't going to finish the report till next day. I was trying her out just to make sure.

She jumped right up like I expected. "I gotta pay you back!" she said real fast. "You come up to my house first and we'll have some more drinks; —I got some crackers and cheese too."

I said, "Sure, Olga, thanks," and all of a sudden I grabbed her tight and kissed her mouth hard. She put her arms around my neck and didn't hold anything back. I laughed to myself, but I liked the way she kissed. I could tell she was part foreign. She didn't get any pay but she was damn good.

"You're a darling, Pete," she said huskily, "but let's go eat now."

"All right," I said. "A night like this—foggy and sticky—gets into a guy."

I led the way down off the *MayBelle* and carried her back up the bank. We both laughed a lot, and I got to thinking how decent she was after all. She didn't want money, and she didn't want to grab on to a guy and keep him; she just wanted to laugh once every so often so she could keep on hoping. Only a little of the mad feeling I'd had when I was talking to Greg had stayed till now.

We went back over the pipe again the same as before. She kept calling things up to me, and she'd sing part of a song in Russian.

"This place ain't so bad in the Spring, Pete," she said. "Then there's birds, and the reeds are green, and I can keep things growing out back of the house."

Over to our left we could see airplane searchlights going back and forth across the sky, and a fire engine siren howled from about a mile away in the city. The frogs were going loud all around, though, and they kept the place from being too big for us.

We got to her house right away and turned in the dirty path that led

up to it. The lights were still on, and it looked comfortable. I was glad we were going there.

"Don't say nothing to Joe about this," Olga said next. "He don't know what these things mean."

"Shut up, Olga," I said. She didn't have to talk like that. "What would I squeal for?" I asked her.

Before we went in, I thumbed my nose at the rolling mill and its flame in the fog.

We went in and sat in the kitchen at the table. She pointed to a window.

"I had some 'glory' vines growing over that screen, but the sulphur gas killed them," she said.

Then she poured some booze, and we drank and ate crackers and cheese. We had a nice time. She said a lot of dumb things, but I felt good and laughed at them all. I guess I said some dumb ones, too.

Then we heard the crew of the *James Peterson* come over the sand pipe. They were booked to pull out at four o'clock for Toledo with a load of chassis frames. They came in gangs of twos and threes and every time some passed Olga made me keep still.

Then some more came, and one of them called in, "How about Friday night, Olga?"

I felt like shouting back, "Go to hell! you lousy bastard!" but Olga said, "shh," and called back, "Go to hell, Jerry!"

I laughed when she said it, but, nevertheless, she had brought the business part of it all back in. She had called his name even. She was nicer than ever after that, but Christ! you can't be in love with a whore, and I got mad again like I'd been before. The party had changed back now, so pretty soon I turned the lights out so she wouldn't notice.

I left the house a lot later, and she went over to the boat with me while I turned the pumps back on. All the way I kept wondering whether Greg would win more or lose more if I got him dice set for sevens and snakes; I'd sort of forgot her.

Then she said she'd walk back as far as the track with me. I knew she wanted to tell me how she felt and make some plans for another night, but we weren't even now, as I saw it. I'd have gone all the way into falling in love with her, if it hadn't been for that Jerry's calling. I remembered him sort of, a Swede that had run a crane in the shipping plant a long time back. I

felt as if Olga'd been an old magazine I'd picked up and read and then left for anyone else.

"Ain't you scared of the rats?" I growled at her.

"No, Pete, darling," she said back, real sweet. "I don't care about the rats or the pumps either now. I can think over all we done tonight for a long time. I won't have to let others in again." She was too late with that crack to help any, though. I didn't want her at all now. She meant all she said too; I knew that.

"I better not see you again this trip," I said. "Joe'll be back, and it wouldn't be so safe." I didn't have any feeling for her, except when I thought of Rinnert coming back to get what I'd gotten. She'd be something damn pleasant to come back to after a long trip.

"I know, Peter, darling," she answered. "I'd even come live at your shack if it'd do. Hell, though, Peter, lots of times'll come up later." She laughed and was real happy. "I'll just wait—it'll be fun."

I laughed, too, but not at what she was thinking about. I laughed because I felt funny and didn't know what else to do. I couldn't have acted different on a bet, not that night, but I didn't want to spoil her good time for her.

Then we were on the damn pipe again, and we started to hear the pumps shooting out their dirty sand. I held her hand, keeping her on the pipe line, but not like before. I hoped to God she wouldn't notice, and I was glad I was in front.

Until we got to the tracks she didn't say much except, "You know how I think about Joe now, don't you Pete? He's just part of the mills."

"Sure, Olga," I answered, "I can understand those things." Then I shut up. I wasn't thinking about the mills or the noise of the pumps, but if she'd talked much more then I'd have knocked her off the pipe.

After we climbed up onto the sand fills; she stopped on the track.

"You gotta go on alone from here, Pete," she said. "The crews and steelmen'll be getting up down there." She meant at the shacks. "You go on, I'll watch you off." Then her voice stuck a little. "For Jesus' sake, Peter," she begged, and kissed me a lot, "don't forget me!"

I said, "No, sweetheart, of course I won't." I was honest saying that because I already had. I said goodnight and started on, she saying something about loving me as I went.

In a minute she called after me, "Peter! Peter!" just like she had back at my room at first.

I turned around and looked at her, standing all dark and funny in the mist.

"Pete," she called over to me, "I just wanted to say that all them other guys I had . . ."

The next was terrible to see. I guess nothing else could be so damn rotten. The flat-cars, emptied, were coasting down the track, and she was still standing there, like she was a plant growing. I hadn't seen them at first on account of the fog, and right then I remembered she couldn't hear them because of the sand shooting out of the pipe so loud behind her. I wanted to hear her say how I had beat out that big bastard Cooper, and more than that I wanted to warn her, but I was like in a trance and couldn't open my mouth. She kept staring at me, and then it happened, quick as lightning.

I heard her say—"they was dogs, I hated them . . ."

Then they hit her, just while she was saying that.

I stood there looking and looking for a while with my mind all shot to hell. There really wasn't much more left of me than of her. All my head was frozen up, and I could only see things. I couldn't forget anything that happened; I still can't. My stomach hurt, and only my legs would work.

I got all of her in the house and then whistled S.O.S. up on the *MayBelle* till the police boat came along. I pointed to her house, and I guess I told them some of it.

They'd looked over the cars when they got back, and the blood on them let me out of it all. Just before dawn when the mills all started again, I turned off *MayBelle's* pumps. Some thrushes or something started up, and the frogs were still going. The sun came up slow and the weather picked up, but the fog stayed heavy. I remember all these things like I remember the Tashmoo boat and her laugh.

There was a chugging about six o'clock, I guess, and Rinnert drew alongside in a bearcat. I watched him get out. He was heavy and had trouble making it.

"Hello, Pete, any news?" he asked up at me in the pilot house.

I still wasn't thinking much. I didn't think of Olga as his wife, and I didn't even miss her, but I kept sort of humming, "Lucky bitch, lucky bitch." I could hardly hear him over the motor on the bearcat and the mills. When he cut the motor and the mills sang, though, I wondered why he couldn't guess for himself.

THE DRUMMER'S SHOES

by

George Milburn

MRS. ESTERBROOK, the mayor's wife, was the kind of woman who couldn't do her own housework. She had to have a hired girl all the time. But she always called her hired girl the maid, and Mrs. Esterbrook's putting on airs like that was the reason she had such a hard time getting anybody to stay and work for her. A country girl who had come to town to get a kitchen job would be insulted when she heard Mrs. Esterbrook calling her the maid in front of visitors and when she found that she was expected to eat alone in the kitchen. Then she would quit the job.

None of them liked the way Mrs. Esterbrook called her attic the servants' quarter, either. It wasn't that they minded sleeping up there in that barren, dusty place with the sharp-pitched underside of shingles for a ceiling and only enough loose flooring laid over the rafters to set an iron cot and a washstand on. That was as good as they had been used to at home in the country. But what they couldn't get used to was the way Mrs. Esterbrook had of calling things by stuck-up names. So none of the hired girls stayed at the Esterbrooks long, and Mrs. Esterbrook's favorite topic of conversation was the servant problem.

She never did get over it about Lois Schaefer, because she thought that Lois was the best maid she had ever had. She stayed blind about Lois long after everyone else in town knew that the hired girl was flighty. But it was a long time before Mrs. Esterbrook would listen to any of the stories about the way Lois had been carrying on. And then she acted as if she were more deeply shocked and hurt than anybody.

Lois came to work for the Esterbrooks one Spring. She was a tall, heavy-hipped farm girl with satchel cheeks and a throat full of braying laughter. The attic room was like an oven on the long Summer evenings, and after the supper dishes were done, Lois would put on her drop-stitch stockings and paint the full sides of her face with orange rouge and walk out. She would

stroll past the Kentucky Colonel Hotel where, usually, two or three drummers would be sitting on the porch, propped back in rocking chairs with their feet up on the railing, taking the evening's cool. Lois would wag her hips under her tight skirt and stare at them boldly. The next time she came past, sometimes a travelling man would get up and follow her off in the dusk.

That went on all Summer. People went to Mrs. Esterbrook and to Mayor Esterbrook, too, and tried to tell them what a shameless girl they had staying with them. But Lois was a hard worker and she was more respectful to Mrs. Esterbrook than any of the other hired girls had been, so the Esterbrooks never would listen to anything against her.

It was along at the beginning of Winter that Lois picked up a big shoe drummer. Bad weather was coming on then. Lois came past the hotel just as the shoe drummer was coming down the front steps.

He said, "Uh, oh, there!"

And Lois said, "Uh, oh, yourself kid!" and gave a blast of laughter.

The shoe drummer came on down the walk, and said, "Which way you going, baby?"

Lois said, "Which way does it look like I'm going, smartie?"

The shoe drummer said, "Well, looky here, sweetie, I sure do like your type. I could care a whole lot for somebody like you. How far ahead you dated up?"

Lois said, "Aw, well, I've got some groceries here I've got to get on to the house with, but if you want to walk with me, I'll show you whur I live."

So the big shoe drummer walked on as far as the Esterbrooks with Lois, and she made a date with him for eleven o'clock that night.

Of course the Esterbrooks were all in bed when eleven o'clock came, and Lois crept down the back stairs to meet the shoe drummer. It had been looking stormy all day, and it was beginning to spit sleet a little. The shoe drummer was waiting out in front of the house, leaning against a tree.

Lois told him, "It's going to sleet, and we ain't got no place to go."

The drummer, all fire, said, "What's the matter with your room?"

Lois said, "Oh, gosh, no! The people I live with would hear us coming in, and then I'd get canned."

"Aw, no they wouldn't," the shoe drummer said. "I'll take off my shoes and carry them and step so soft they won't even hear me come in."

So Lois said, all right, and when they got to the foot of the back stairs he stooped over and unbuttoned his shoes and took them off. He carried them

in one hand. He had a small flashlight in his other hand, and they went creeping up to her attic room. They stepped tip-toe, sly and cautious in the way that only lumbering big people can be.

"Now you want to watch out up here at the top," Louis whispered, "because the boards on this floor is loose, and they ain't no floor laid on part of it, and if you ain't keerful, you're liable to step off on the lath and go right on through the plaster. And the man and woman I'm working for has their bedroom right below. They're sleeping down there."

As soon as they got to the top of the back stairs and opened the attic door, the first thing the big shoe drummer did, of course, was step on a loose board. It flipped up and he lost his balance. He landed over on the unfloored part of the attic. He floundered a moment trying to get back his footing, the great, heavy man, and then he went crashing through.

He fell, with a shower of plaster and splinters, in the center of the Esterbrooks large bed on the floor below. They were both sound asleep, but they were awakened suddenly by the frightful noise. Both of them leaped out of bed, terrified, and as of one mind made for the door. The shoe drummer still clutched his flashlight, and he saw the door, too. They all reached it at the same time. All three of them were big, stomachy people, and they jammed tight and unyielding in the bedroom doorway.

Lois Schaefer peered over the edge of the jagged hole in the bedroom ceiling, shrieking, "I told the big boob to watch out for them there loose boards! No, he wouldn't listen to me, the big old slob! But I sure told the big boob to watch out for them there loose boards!"

Almost silently there in the dark the big-bellied three twisted and grunted. They were caught fast in the doorway. But finally the drummer tore loose, and, bearing shreds of Mr. and Mrs. Esterbrooks' nightgowns, he went thudding out through the parlor to the front door, and was gone.

The Esterbrooks told Lois Schaefer to pack up and get out that very night.

The next morning they found the drummer's shoes in the bedroom where he had dropped them. They were fancy, button shoes, a pale yellow leather, with hard-knobbed toes, all pinked at the seams. They seemed to be an expensive pair of shoes.

Mayor Esterbrook tried to wear them for a while, but they were so tight on his feet that he traded them to Paperhanger Birchett for plastering up the hole that the shoe drummer had left in the bedroom ceiling.

THE CATS WHICH CRIED

by

Whit Burnett

HE was a man no longer very young, considerably bald and pink on top, with a round, smooth chin, blue eyes, a mild, passive gaze and a quiet manner. Every noon at exactly the same time he took his lunch in the same sheltered corner of the little *Auberge des St. Pères*, a very moderate small restaurant in the street that was named for the great man Buonaparte. He was a humble, easy to please sort of patron, ordered rather frugally, and always petted old Marshal, the cat. One day he did not appear. Marshal, stretching his long legs sleepily and sensually, walked into the corner of the second dining room, smiled blandly without being quite awake and indolently soared up onto the leather wall-seat to have his neck rubbed, found, unaccountably, a strange man in the usual corner, and retired in obvious puzzlement, not unmixed with hauteur.

Mr. Pease never went back to the Inn of the Holy Fathers. And after a few days his presence was not particularly missed. Such is life in Paris that all things may be regular for scores of years, but let a change once take place and there is no missing the past. Marshal, fat in his eunuch's nature, mooned about a week or so, looking with a sort of diffused lostness now and then at noontime into the corner, vacant or occupied by some meager English touring school teacher, and then avoided the dining room at the lunch hour entirely.

"*Eh bien, Maréchal!*" said one of the waiters—and both waiters are very astute at the *Auberge des St. Pères*, "You miss your very good friend, then, eh?"

Marshal miowed, and the waiters winked. They presumed to know the story. For they had seen the two together for months and months. Marshal, lying dreamily in the arms of his friend, his eyes half open, half shut, wreathed in a pleasant intoxication, and the lone diner slowly, beautifully, gently caressing the soft rich fur with undulant rhythmic hands which rose and fell like waves.

"Voilà, Maréchal," sympathized the waiter, "*un bon morceau de poisson!*"

The cat looked for a moment at the fish bones hurled along the floor and, disinterested, went to the threshold which gave toward the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, and sat, musing, in the sun.

The state of his funds, and a natural desire to avoid the scene of an unhappy incident in his life, caused Mr. Pease to take himself and his walking stick, a round, stained old Malacca, across the Boulevard St. Germain into a neighborhood where food is even a little less expensive and where, in side streets, life is quiet, speculative and not very much bother. He dined in the Sorbonne quarter and there he found not only good food, but reasonable food, and what the *Auberge* lacked, a pleasant, tabled *terrasse*.

One day, in the Spring, when the Quarter was still a bit new to Mr. Pease, he was seated outdoors with his back against a glass windscreen at a table for one, his customary place at the little cafe to the left of the melancholy statue of Auguste Comte, when a familiar sound absorbed him. He bent down and looked underneath the table. He half expected something to rub against his ankles. Nothing did. The sound seemed rather to come from the air.

Mr. Pease turned his head.

"*Bonjour, m'sieu*," said the little man.

Mr. Pease gazed, mildly enough, at a very diminutive old man, with a tray about his neck, his felt hat held very deferentially at an angle from his head, and his little beard, carefully trimmed to a greyish-black peak, thrust out pleasantly and at a slight, somewhat inquiring angle.

In his right hand, above the tray of Paris picture postcards, the little man was holding a card on which appeared the colored likeness of a kitten. And as the little fellow pressed the pasteboard there came plaintive, tiny kitten-calls.

"*Très joli*," induced the diminutive vendor, as Mr. Pease gazed on. "*Un franc*."

Mr. Pease smiled, pulled out a franc, the vendor left the kitten on the table, thanked the buyer most respectfully, bowed, with his hat on his hand, and shuffled in the most exceptional gait past a table or two toward other diners, bowed, pressed on his cat cards, and at last continued, slowly, shufflingly, down to the Boulevard.

Mr. Pease looked idly at the colored kitten card. He carefully com-

pounded the elements for his salad dressing. A frown went, now and then, across his high round forehead, until his palish eyes clouded behind his unrimmed glasses. He ate the salad thoughtfully. He reached out once and placed an experimental finger on the kitten, which immediately squeaked a response and caused a couple of Americans to turn and look his way. Mr. Pease withdrew his hand and blushed. . . .

For the rest of the Spring, M. Armand, quite regularly, with his slow shuffling pace, went by the *terrasse*, bowed, and had a few words with *Monsieur l'Américain*, and Mr. Pease, whose money had dwindled, prolonged his coffee or sometimes simply his *plat du jour* without coffee, until little old Monsieur Armand showed up. They became good friends, in a passing sort of way. Mr. Pease bought when he felt it about time he ought, out of friendship, to give his trade to M. Armand; and M. Armand at times, as a merchant who values good will, occasionally pressed upon Mr. Pease a postcard free.

Mr. Pease, since the visit and departure of the two women he had been seen with that day in the *Auberge*, knew no one in Paris. And he had not especially cared to. He lived in a small single room in the *rue Monsieur le Prince*, for which he paid a few francs a day, and where he read and promised he would soon devote his life to sketching. He rarely sketched, however, and grey dust gathered on the idle pads and pencils.

His room was rather barren and gave a dreary impression. He had had it for three or four years. But he had not in any particular way ornamented it. Where there had hung for so long a picture of a woman there now was merely a square spot faintly less discolored with time and dust and damp than the rest of the walls. And the bureau, with its small, somewhat crooked mirror, was the only brightened place, its top serving as a stand for the vari-colored cards Mr. Pease had bought, from time to time, from the little old man who sold the cats which cried.

It is the coincidence in Paris, as elsewhere, that when one's money is gone, so also is the available money of one's friends. Mr. Pease had come, at last, to bedrock, and the frightful inertia that had gathered about him for the last two or three years closed in on him. He neither had money nor had he friends. When he lunched now, or dined, on the *terrasse* by the rain-stained statue of M. Comte, whose determined mystical features had come to be

rather an affront to Mr. Pease, Mr. Pease ordered only one dish, a soup, usually, and sometimes only *café crème*. And when M. Armand passed by, he was unable, in the end, to afford a cat, or even a view of the bridges of the Seine.

And then, one Saturday, M. Armand passed by, without any cat cards at all. This fact so surprised Mr. Pease that it jerked him into realization of his surroundings, to an awareness of other people's lives, and the general movement of life, of losing and winning, of existence itself.

"What!" he said, as M. Armand stood by his chair, his hat elevated at its usual angle from the side of his head, and the sunlight falling aslant the barest trace of coffee at the corner of his mouth in his beard. "No cats?"

"*Ab, m'sieu'*," apologized the Cat Man, "*pas un chat!* Not one."

He explained, and the explanation was rather long, so Mr. Pease asked M. Armand to join him in a coffee—he had a few lone dollars of the last ten left—and M. Armand thanked him, removed his hat entirely, seated himself precisely on the very edge of the chair, and sipped the coffee as politely as his nature, one of inherent delicacy, meant him to sip invited coffee.

It was, he explained, the tariff. The customs agents at the border. The government. The general conditions in the world as a whole since the War. Life. In short, France, with an egotism which only the French could have, he parenthesized—for he was a Belgian—had so elevated the import duty on the little cats which cried that the firm in Paris which had been importing them from Germany and wholesaling them to M. Armand by the dozen, had ceased to import.

"Of course," he said, "if I can ever save up enough to get them to order me a full gross, well, then, that's another story. They would break their necks to order me a gross, tariff or not. But, you understand, my dear *m'sieu'*, a gross of little kitten cards! *Ma foi!* Perhaps the rubber would not remain good. Perhaps I should have a conflagration in my home. One must realize the danger of such a stock on one's hands!"

M. Armand sighed. He did not lament; but it seemed a blow. A man earned an honest living with the little cats, and then a government raised such a hullabaloo of a tariff that a small *entrepreneur* was fairly put to it to continue his very existence. The picture cards, such as the view of the Sorbonne, went well enough, but, you would see, he added, they would be no real attraction: he rose and passed slowly and politely among the patrons further along the *terrasse*. None bought a card. One offered the little man a franc,

but refused the card, and M. Armand, in honor, had to refuse then, politely, the franc. He returned, smiling sadly, to Mr. Pease.

"Voilà," he said, "when one has no cats. . . ."

Mr. Pease thought a while and offered his lone contribution of advice.

"What of dogs, then?" he asked. "Those barking dogs like the elderly monsieur sells on the *Boul' Mich'* I have seen time to time. You know?"

"*Monsieur!*"

M. Armand's face became firm and offended.

"Do not speak to me of him! Nor of his barking dogs, *non plus*. Dogs! *Alors!* . . . But . . . *je m'excuse! Je demande pardon, m'sieu'!*"

"*Pas du tout—*"

"But," M. Armand's curiosity got the better of his offence, "does m'sieu' know the man who sells the dogs which bark?"

Monsieur had only seen him once or twice.

"Ah, then, *voilà!*" M. Armand's thin shoulders rose and fell. "You do not know. That man! That villain! And besides he is no gentleman. He is nothing at all. When he makes one franc, even less perhaps, where do you find him? With his head in a bottle of *vin rouge*. No respect! I cannot live like that. I am a married man, monsieur. I have a wife, a home. Here, you see," he opened his tray and fished at the bottom, finding an imposing looking document, "you see the *Préfet de Police* commission that I sell cats. Cats! Not dogs!"

Mr. Pease was a little taken aback. He apologized.

"And cats are more distinctive, anyway," he said.

"Of course," agreed M. Armand. "M'sieu' likes cats, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Ah," sighed M. Armand. "Then m'sieu' is an artist. All artists love cats."

Mr. Pease coughed and lied, perversely.

"No," he said, slowly, "I am a business man."

"Ah," exclaimed the vendor, "*ca c'est bon, eh? Les affaires sont les affaires, non? Un business man! Formidable! . . .*"

Well . . . we couldn't all be business men, alas. For his part, M. Armand volunteered, he was an artist.

"An artist?" inquired Mr. Pease.

"*Oui, M'sieu'*. I was photographer. Good profession. I worked on the *Grands Boulevards*, at night. It was my profession to go into strange places,

you know? Downstairs, often as not, to photograph the lady artists without any clothes. It was very interesting. Pleasant, well-paid work. But one night when I was going down into a cellar in the *rue Pigalle* I slipped down the steps, and broke both arms, three ribs and both of the legs here. That is why I walk so slowly. The camera it was also ruined and I lay in the Sister of Charity hospital eight months till the money of my savings was all *fini*."

Mr. Pease sympathized. The coffee was ended and the two shook hands, politely, in the French manner.

When Mr. Pease reached his room he counted all the cat cards on his bureau. There were quite a number. Then he gathered them all together and put them, a little pile, carefully into his breast pocket. . . .

But the next day he did not see the Cat Man. Nor the next. Whenever, by accident, Mr. Pease leaned back in his chair, or his arm brushed his bulging pocket while he was having his coffee at the *Place de la Sorbonne*—for he ate his daily bread and cheese in his room—the kittens uttered persistent faint cries, and Mr. Pease, embarrassed, buried his nose in his cup. . . .

For days the Cat Man was absent from his beat. And Mr. Pease, once or twice, tried to find out through the waiters and even the cigar store man next door, if they knew where the Cat Man lived. No one did.

On the fifth day, Mr. Pease noticed the appearance of the Barking Dog Man. He came yiping his way slowly but boldly into the *Place de la Sorbonne*. It was the first time, so far as Mr. Pease could remember, that he had seen him come right into the *place*. Mr. Pease took time to knit his brow darkly and scowl at the fellow. But the fellow was obviously an insensitive dolt, and did not particularly notice the man in the rather well-worn old grey suit, seated at the table.

He was a bigger man than little M. Armand, Mr. Pease observed. And his features were loose and coarse. He had a miserable stubble of an all-around beard and a huge bulb of a nose, purple with drink. His eyes were mere dim reddened remnants of eyes, under a fringe of yellowish eyebrows. And his hat, unlike M. Armand's neat old fedora, had a hole in its crown and sweat and dust had stained its band to greenish grey, like mold.

But, Mr. Pease noticed, a little ruefully, two or three tourists, who were lunching on the *terrasse*, were captivated by the rubber-bodied, pewter-headed barking dogs, and the old man sold three . . . and then he slouched away, squeaking his dogs and watching a little furtively, Mr. Pease thought, from side to side, until he regained the common stream of traffic of the Boulevard.

The *Vitrier* was there. He was a solemn, bemoustached fellow, who from early morning until nightfall, strolled through the streets with small panes of glass in a wooden case on his back, and sang at the top of his lungs to windows high above him, "Anybody want glass? Anybody want panes? *Voilà le Vitrier! Vit-ri-er!*"

Also the *concierge's* wife was invited, because she and Mme. Armand were so friendly, and it is indeed meet that one be friendly with the house-master's wife, as M. Armand well appreciated.

He also invited a colleague, but rival—the Japanese elder brother of the yellow-skinned, slant-eyed girls who juggled knives on the Boulevards. He was a lean young man, and sat a little apart, most of the evening, against a wall, his glass being refilled whenever anyone thought of him, and his silent, wide grin seemingly having become something fixed and dependable. The Jap sold celluloid trinkets, some of them quaintly lewd, which had rings fixed in them and could be used for watch charms. Purchasers put them quickly in their pockets and took them home; but it is doubtful if anyone ever used them for watch charms.

M. Armand had been sick. Flu got him once a year. This time it had been quite light and had lasted not much longer than a week.

But when a man has a birthday and counts on a birthday party, he explained, that hastens a man's recovery. M. Armand celebrated regularly two *fêtes* a year, his birth and his name days. He was up and about, busy as a host. Hope, he said, was something.

"*Oui,*" said the *concierge's* wife, "*ça c'est quelque-chose.*"

She was fat above the average of most Parisian janitors' wives, had appeared in a loose housedress, and was drinking with nice moderation, since excitement and drink made her good heart flutter. She related how her daughter, now married, had had a tendency to get sick at times as a girl, but you just suggest the country to her, or a promise of a trip even to Joinville, and *ma foi!* wouldn't she perk up!

The American, upon whose friendly glistening head the single drop-light shone, sat with his glass in hand, occasionally sipping the wine, and feeling, for once, at ease with life, in spite of the fact he had never before appeared in such an alien, mixed assemblage. He spent a long time in a sympathetic discussion with the *Vitrier* over the rising cost of glass. The *Vitrier* consoled himself with the red Bordeaux which he had himself ordered, on

his neighbor M. Armand's behalf, from a cousin who ran a wine, coal and wood store combined.

The home of M. Armand, which occupied the top floor of a grey old building of mediaeval antiquity off the ragamuffin *Mouffetard* section in the *rue Pot de Feu*, was small but comfortable. It had three rooms and a fair-sized storage closet with a small window on line with a forest of chimney pots. In the closet M. Armand kept his crying cats and scenic postcards, his broken tripod of the time of his fall, and a spare cot on which, at times, some Belgian relative slept on infrequent visits to Paris.

"*Voilà le Vitrier!*" suddenly boomed the bemoustached glassman, and after rising and holding the bottle aloft, poured out everyone another splashing huge tumbler of *rouge*.

"Again M. Armand," said Mr. Pease, feeling himself called upon as the stranger in their midst, "again to your long life, prosperity, your wife, your health and your posterity!"

M. Armand bowed, and the others, from their chairs, held up their glasses.

"And," replied M. Armand, "to our distinguished friend and guest, *Monsieur l'Américain,—beesnissmehn!*"

... Thereafter, Mr. Pease called now and then, and was welcomed, *chez les Armands*. It was only a few blocks up past the Pantheon, and through a twisting street behind the Church of St. Etienne du Mont, and then through the square where the *Mouffetardois* hung out like urban peasants among the cheese stores and vegetable carts, vendors and barterers of old shoes and sad-eyed calves' heads, of sausages and flowers in season.

Mr. Pease had grown to dislike intensely the Barking Dog Man. He shared with M. Armand the feeling that the intrusion on the Cat Man's territory was a scandal and a shame. But—without further cat cards, business was dull indeed.

Those cards which Mr. Pease had returned, gratis, to M. Armand, a gesture which had touched M. Armand's heart and caused him to insist that Mr. Pease be present at the *fête* of his birth, had gone in a mere few days.

And the French substitute cards the dealer handed out to M. Armand almost brought tears of indignation to his eyes.

He pressed the cards, in a tired hopeless way.

"The cry is there," he said, "but what a cat! More like a mule. And also, the eyes. What eyes!"

In despair, however, he bought a few dozen, and showed them later to Mr. Pease.

Mr. Pease was interested, and with a few pencil strokes, which he afterward retraced in white ink, he made whiskers that were much more life-like. In the *rue St. Jacques*, walking along together, they happened upon a button shop which had buttons which looked exactly like kitten eyes, green and light with bright black pupils.

"Ah, ah," M. Armand became excited, "*Comme ça c'est beau, eh!*"

The two gazed together at the finished kitten.

"Ah, M'sieu' Pease!" said M. Armand, "how you know cats!"

They went back to Armand's rooms, and for two or three days, with Mme. Armand pasting on the eyes, they turned out a store of cats. Mr. Pease, between times, rested on the cot in the spare room, and once he even slept there, the night he accompanied M. Armand to the Boulevards to see how the product sold.

They walked together very slowly, for the accident to his legs had indeed done something to the bones of M. Armand. But Mr. Pease had nowhere else to go; he did not mind the pace. He looked, with a professional eye on *terrasse* diners, and became, after a few observations, quite as adept as M. Armand in spotting a good pitch. He did not actually sell a card. He simply said to M. Armand, "*Voilà, les Américains*—with the two young girls!" M. Armand squinted his eye in grave assent and shuffled over, his hat at respectful tilt, to the table.

Mr. Pease usually carried a number of cats in his pockets, some of the best of his handiwork, in which he took a very reasonable pride. And now and then as he stood at the curb teetering on his old Malacca, he would pull out a kitten card and study it in earnest. A little thinner whiskers, perhaps, and next time perhaps just a trifle more pink on the nose there. . . .

"With such good eyes," suggested Mr. Pease, "we could double the price. Try two francs a card."

They sold as many for two francs as they had previously sold for one.

"That comes," said Mr. Pease, "from having a business training."

And they went into a small *bistrot* off the *rue Monge*, where the wine was excessively cheap but also somewhat watered, and ordered a couple of glasses of white.

There was no secret between them that Mr. Pease was financially embarrassed. Otherwise he would have staked M. Armand, the little vendor knew, to the gross of German cards.

"Even so," M. Armand had remarked, "our new creation is very much better. It is *infiniment magnifique!*"

And so, as they were seated in a corner, somewhat apart from the ragged snipe-gatherers who had assembled to sort out the A-1 butts, containing American tobacco, from the more stepped-upon and bedraggled third-rate French gutter types (which must necessarily bring a lower price when turned in to the tobacco assembler in the morning) M. Armand brought forth the evening's proceeds. He counted out the card costs, cost of eyes, cost of Chinese White whisker ink which he had provided, and then he divided the remaining ten or twelve francs into two equal piles.

"*Voilà, mon cher,*" he said. "*Les affaires sont les affaires. A la santé!*"

"*Maintenant,*" he added, "*c'est la saison. Tout marche bien.* We shall be rich and prosperous."

Mr. Pease, who had removed, bit by bit, his minor possessions from his room in the *rue Monsieur le Prince*, leaving only his bill behind him, accompanied his friends toward the *rue Pot de Feu*. For a few francs a week, a great saving from his previous quarters, he had taken over the storage room.

At the Boulevard St. Michel, they encountered the lean young celluloid charm man. The young Jap grinned. The two shiny-haired girls were a little ahead of him, walking through a cafe, juggling precariously their several large rusty butcher knives with sweat-stained handles.

"*Tout va bien?*" asked Mr. Pease.

"*Merci,*" said the Japanese, "*Ça va!*"

"You haven't seen that son of a cow of a man with the dogs, have you?" asked M. Armand.

"No," said the Japanese.

"Fa!" spat M. Armand. "Drunk again, I suppose. Or else he'd be pinching my route!"

Mr. Pease adapted himself to a professional life with seriousness. No one had ever asked him anything about his private affairs and although once he felt disposed to tell M. Armand an incident or two, because it seemed pertinent once or twice, and a little amusing, even . . . if you looked at it in the right way . . . he refrained.

What had been, had been. When Sylvia and her mother had come over from America and found him there, taking no more interest in his life's work, as they had said, than that, there was little he could do to hold them. It is true, he was engaged, but past forty, an engagement, after all, does not seem, at least after it is broken, so important. Indeed, he had never been sure whether he had ever loved Sylvia or not. Probably not. It would have suited her mother and his own that they marry. But did he actually feel her indispensable? He hardly thought so. And that episode about the cat! That was strange . . . and yet. . . .

How the two women had flounced out of the restaurant that day! And the look of disgusted horror on the face of Sylvia! Mr. Pease felt something shudder within him, and he had examined himself with an introspective eye. The thing was ridiculous. And yet she had said, "You seem to care more about that dirty old cat you are *caressing* than you do about me!"

Carefully, he had helped Marshal down from his lap to the floor, and the three, in stark silence, had gone on with their meal in the corner. He noticed the waiters giggling. But he scarcely realized the women had, too.

Mr. Pease recalled such things seldom any more. It was true, he told himself a little mournfully, that there had been perhaps more cats in his life than women. There was that fine yellow Persian of his landlady's in San Francisco. My, what a superb cat Pepper had been! And then his own half dozen or so: Moses, the black cat,—go down, Moses, from that table!—and Hermann, so named before she presented him with kittens. Cats, cats! Well, they had feeling, individuality. . . . But it was something else again to have heard the waiters at the *Auberge* refer to him as the Man Who Loves The Cat. . . .

Mr. Pease rallied, dutifully, to attention. For M. Armand had been chattering for a space of time at a seeming rate of speed. Wine made M. Armand loquacious. It made Mr. Pease, if anything, a little more indefinite.

"It's that son of a cow of a man again," the little beard was wagging. "And who can predict the public? For weeks, is it not, our kittens were all the *chic*. And *his* tin-headed dogs—did anyone but a fool and a scoundrel ever buy one? No. *Dix fois non!* And now what? This new-fangled, *double-entendre* of a dog, which barks and *ppppssst!* *Nom de Dieu, Monsieur*, what next!"

"Unfair competition," said Mr. Pease, straightening in his chair. He had been pensively watching outside where an old *clochard* and his scraggly

woman were picking their ragged way down the streets to their night rest spot beneath bridges of the Seine. "Unfair."

Mr. Pease had not been any slower than his partner to observe how much the bulb-nosed Dog Man had cut into their territory. The Dog Man had gone through the same restaurants and along the same terraces an hour or so before Mr. Pease and M. Armand began their shuffling rounds. That was bad enough. They had given him several dirty looks when first they saw him, and once M. Armand had shaken his tiny fist. That was sufficient. But since, somehow, old Jean Lupenoff had come upon a stock of entirely new dogs, which barked when pressed on one side and which shot forth a stream of water when pressed on the other, the public was demanding dogs. Barking, and more than barking, dogs. There was no denying it.

"He should be put out of business," said Mr. Pease. He had no idea of how. He said it largely as a show of sympathy. "We had this territory before he had his dogs."

"*Bien entendu!* Just let me catch him butting again into the *place de la Sorbonne*," flamed little M. Armand. "Let him waddle along the quais. That's all he's good for. The loafer!"

That night the spell of fair weather ended. The wind made wild witch women of the trembling branched trees of the Luxembourg. The rain beat down. M. Armand and his partner Mr. Pease, seeing the waiters along the Boulevards scurrying about to rush the diners indoors, decided to call off business for the evening. The cats had mewed, but it was like the other nights, hardly any had been sold. It was the time, some will remember, when almost everyone had a little water-bodied dog. It was hardly the time for cats.

"*C'est la vie*," said M. Armand, "one does, and one does not."

They decided to go up St. Michel as far as the Gay-Lussac and maybe run into the Japanese and the girls. The Japanese usually had a few tidbits in his pocket and was always sociable in his way and clean—far better company for men like Armand and Pease than the low crowd one encountered in the *clochard* sections closer to the river.

It was near the Gay-Lussac that M. Armand encountered, all too fatefully, not only the Japanese, but the Dog Man, beaming rather unnecessarily, it seemed to the smaller man, with swelled-up profits. The Dog Man was drunk, red-faced and jolly.

The Japanese was just greeting Mr. Pease, and the Japanese had one of

his little sisters by the hand. Black, shiny rain was dripping on them all, as M. Armand was shaking the hand of Toto's sister, who had poked half a dozen juggling butcher-knives under an arm to take the age-browned fingers of the Cat Man. It was at this moment that old Jean Lupenoff came sailing broadsides on, around the corner, two or three little dogs in his big paws, and the fatalistic smile upon his face.

"*Le voilà!*" yelled M. Armand. "There he is. That dog face!"

The Dog Man stopped—broadly, drunkenly, a little lost-like, peered hard into the face of M. Armand, who did not budge, and then lurched widely on up the Gay-Lussac.

M. Armand followed, at a frantic, vengeful shuffle. And, since they were all of a party, Toto and his sister with the knives, and Mr. Pease, went too.

The next corner was only dimly lit. The Russian restaurant had closed and there were no cafes in the street.

"Yaaaaa!" cried M. Armand, almost overtaking his enemy. "He butts into my *place*. The son of a son of a son . . ."

Mr. Pease rushed up, hoping to restrain the little man, when the Dog Man turned suddenly upon them both, opened his large mouth, laughed, and then squeaked a dog, which at the same time squirted and caught M. Armand full in the face. It was too much. He jumped and caught the Dog Man's beard.

The Japanese girl screamed.

Mr. Pease, as the two men rolled into the street, slopping wet with rain, went into a panic. All his muscles shook. He saw his little partner rolling in the rain, now on top, and now underneath.

He reached for air, clenched his smooth hands, and then realized he had somewhere lost his stick. The kittens in his pocket were squeezed windless, and one cat card in his hand was screaming high. . . .

The police arrived as Mr. Pease was standing menacingly over his partner and their common enemy.

Mr. Pease was trying to get the Japanese juggler's butcher-knife into such a position that the vicious Dog Man, without being at all mortally wounded, could, at the same time, nevertheless, see that somebody had a butcher-knife.

The *agent de police* saw it, however, before it was seen by the victim.

"Look!" cried the Dog Man, as he gathered up his scattered dogs, "two against one! And one of them," he finally saw the juggler's prop, "a regular murderer!"

* * *

Mr. Pease, being an American, presumably—(he said he'd lost his passport, and perhaps he had, for none was found on him)—was permitted to keep the clothes he came in. They were sorry enough clothes, heaven knows, and when they locked him alone in the *arrondissement* jail, they said they didn't think he would really get much. Of course, he had no police card of identity. He had no passport. He was attacking a man with a butcher-knife. He was obviously peddling without a permit from the Prefect. There was no record of his reputability such as let the other peddler off.

Mr. Pease bowed his head. He offered no defence. His face was sallow and he felt fagged out. He was somewhat baffled. All these things were true, he knew. Things should be done—or should not be done. There were laws.

He thought, for a moment, of his mother in America, and the girl, the woman he had lost. And the small, regular respectable allowance that had long been cut off. . . . The letters he had decided he would never write.

As they locked him in, and the jailer went back along the hallway to the front of the building, he relaxed. The strain, the excitement of the violent encounter in the street, had sapped him of his strength. He gave up wondering if M. Armand was trying to get him out. He felt too tired.

When, at last, he turned over on the wall shelf, designed for him to sleep upon, a faint, muffled, tiny cry pitied the stillness of the cell. Mr. Pease had touched a bit of pasteboard: a little hand-painted cat card had slipped down through a pocket hole, outhiding the searchers, and lodged in the lining of his old threadbare coat.

THE WIVES

by

Doris Peel

THEY had given her a book to look at. It was a big book with thin, whispy pages, and it was filled with pictures: in the front part rows of ladies with coats on, and then rows of ladies with dresses on, and then rows of ladies' heads wearing hats. She wondered if it was a story. Perhaps all the ladies had gone outdoors and then come indoors and then had their heads cut off. . . .

She grew tired suddenly of looking at the book. She remembered her loose tooth, and woggled it very gently with the tip of her tongue. Mother said that if she would pull it out and put it in the Coronation Mug, the next morning it would turn into a real silver locket. She had tried several times, most hard, to pull it out. She tried now, pinching it between two fingers. But her face went all hot and her heart galloped straight up into her throat—so that she whipped her hand down again, in a panic, and thrust it behind her.

After that she didn't think about anything special for several minutes; then she looked across the room at the ladies, and began to think about them.

They were sitting by the fire. Their faces and their hands were pink; their heads were bent forward, and there were bright loops of light around their heads, like the light around Jesus in the picture. Their needles dipped up and down, and sometimes they flashed; and the thimbles flashed, too, on their fingers; and the scissors went snapping like a little silver animal at the soft, striped stuff in Auntie Annie's black lap.

Only Auntie Annie and the lady called Mrs. Thorne were sewing. Mother wasn't. Mother was sitting in a big chair, a dark chair, very still. Mother never sewed. *She* didn't either. Auntie Annie had tried once to teach her, but she had pricked her fingers so often that there had been little dots of blood all along the strip of cloth. Mother had watched, her hands folded under her chin; Mother had said: "That's what I do, too——"

She wondered what Auntie Annie and Mrs. Thorne were talking about. Their voices were slow, and thick. They were different from the way they

had been at the beginning of the afternoon. That was something she had noticed. When ladies—not Mother, but other ladies—visited like this they were chattery and laughy at first; then the room got darker, and the ladies seemed to huddle forward in their chairs, and their voices seemed to huddle, too, and everything began to look and sound and feel sort of—secret.

She listened carefully for a moment.

Auntie Annie was saying: "I couldn't choose. I simply *couldn't*!" And now Mrs. Thorne was saying: "Well, I could! I love my children, but my husband means more to me than all of them, than all twelve of them put together—"

She stopped listening, and thought about that. And the more she thought about it the more startled she became. Mrs. Thorne loved one husband more than twelve children! It was almost too much to be taken in. Why, Mr. Thorne must be—she was staggered, dazzled, at the mere idea of Mr. Thorne. Worth more than twelve whole children! Why, he must be so special, so wonderful—She had seen the Governor-General once. He had come through a door, and a band had played and all the people had stood up and clapped. That must be what it would be like when Mr. Thorne came. . . .

She felt suddenly excited. She stopped looking at the ladies, and looked at the door instead.

And at last, after a long while! A bell was ringing through the house! Auntie Annie's "girl" was clopping up the hall, was rattling a knob, was clopping back again this way, nearer and nearer.

She slid off the chair, standing ready, with her hands clasped tightly to her stomach. The ladies had stopped sewing, and had lifted their heads. Even the fire seemed to be leaning out of the grate, and the pictures on the mantel were almost turning their eyes. He was coming—coming!

And now the "girl" was rattling *this* knob. "In here, sir," she was saying. And through the door stepped a thin, smallish man, with pale brown hair and pale brown gloves.

She wondered, breathlessly, who he was. Perhaps he walked in front of Mr. Thorne, as the soldiers had walked in front of the Governor-General.

He stood still, on a yellow flower in the carpet, moving his hat gently in his hands. "Edgar—" said Mrs. Thorne. And suddenly Mrs. Thorne was standing up, big and bright looking with her black hair and her red mouth, was standing up and kissing this man, a hard, greedy kiss. . . .

It was dark when they left Auntie Annie's. Mrs. Thorne and Mr. Thorne were staying there for supper; but Mother said *they* couldn't—they had something to do. She wondered what it was. When Father was away like this they could do almost anything.

They walked down the path, holding hands. The cape on Mother's coat made a soft, flapping noise; when she looked over her shoulder she could see the cape, flying out behind them like a dark wing; and she could see, too, higher up, the little white feather in Mother's hat. On the pavement they stopped. Mother didn't seem to know which way to turn; then, "Let's not go home," she said. "Let's have a picnic." So they went up the street, growing shadows in the lamplight, and losing them, and finding them again, up and up, until they came to the windows of the shops.

Mrs. Herman's shop had just shut for the night; but Mother rapped her wedding ring against the glass, and Mrs. Herman stopped spreading muslin veils over the cakes and unlocked the door for them.

"I'm so sorry," Mother said. "I *must* try to remember." She stood in front of the counter, her cape hanging flat now, and the little feather straight and pointed, like a rabbit's ear. "Two of those, please," she said, "and two of those." And then she said: "Oh—I forgot. I haven't any money." But Mrs. Herman only laughed, and wrote something on a square of paper and spiked it on a black hook with a lot of other squares of paper.

They went next door then, to Mr. Paul's, and he let them have a bunch of pale green grapes; and after that they went back along the street, past the houses, past the lamps, to the windy bank of the canal. . . .

They sat on a bench, all alone. It was cold out now. Leaves kept blowing into their faces and blowing off again. There were some lights on the shore opposite—little staring yellow ones, like the eyes of cats; and behind the lights there was a big, pumpkin-colored moon, moving up quite fast, as if somebody in heaven was pulling it on a string. They sat there watching it, and eating slowly. They ate the white cakes first, then the chocolate ones, and then the grapes; and when they had finished eating she blew breath into the paper bags, but didn't pop them because the bang always frightened her. . . .

Mother leaned forward, without speaking to her for a while. Then, "Look!" Mother said. So she threw away the bags and leaned forward, too.

There was a boat on the canal. It was coming down towards them, coming softly, darkly. It was like a pirate's boat, with some lights swinging on it,

and black masts so tall that you could almost hear them scratching across the moon. Nearer it was coming, nearer and nearer. They sat quite still. Again they didn't speak, until all at once Mother said: "Perhaps if we called out it would come in and fetch us."

She was surprised. Would it? "Why would it?"

Mother didn't answer.

"Why?" she asked again. "Where is it going?"

Mother stared across the water, her hands folded under her chin. She dropped her hands suddenly. "I don't know—" Mother said.

But they didn't call out, and the boat went past them, and away, and soon she couldn't remember if it had really been there on the canal, or if she had just pretended. . . .

The house always looked so big at night. As soon as the sun went in it began to grow, the way the furniture grew in her room when the light was turned off. They moved towards it, softly, because there were leaves under their feet. The trees said "Ah—ah—" Round and round the sound curved, far above them, in the darkness.

Now Mother was feeling for the key down the little opening in her glove. Now she was stooping forward, with the key in her hand. She fitted it in the lock; she turned it, and drew it out, and pushed the door open—

There was a light on in the hall. Under the light stood Father.

Nobody said anything for a moment. Just the trees. "Ah—ah—" Then Father said, "Katherine—my darling," and, loudly, quickly, with his stretched-out arms making shadows on the walls, he came towards them both, and caught hold of Mother, and drew Mother back with him into the circle of light, and kissed Mother, hard, hard, just like—

Mother called out in a high, clear voice: "Come inside, Katie."

So she came in, too, blinking a little, wobbling a little with sleepiness.

Father was pulling off Mother's hat and dropping it on the floor; he was kissing Mother's hair; he was saying: "You didn't really think I had forgotten?"

Mother said: "Forgotten—"

And Father said: "Why, it's the seventeenth, Katherine. Six years ago tonight—" and he picked up Mother's hand and kissed the wedding ring on her finger.

And all at once, standing there, watching them, she thought of something. It came quite close for a moment, dipping down in front of her, lift-

ing, dipping. If Mrs. Thorne loved Mr. Thorne, with his pale brown hair and his pale brown gloves, more than twelve whole children—if Mrs. Thorne—then Mother— But there was no word for it, no way of saying how Mother must love Father: Father who was big as a giant, Father who was so strong that he could do anything at all, snap things over his knee, twist things in his hands. Why, Mother must love him— But it lifted again, lifted and faded.

Upstairs, after she had clicked on the light, Mother said: "I shan't be able to sleep with you now, Katie," and took her pillow off the bed, and her long white nightdress, and went across the hall to the other room. She was sorry. It was fun when Mother slept in here. They lay on their backs, in the dark, and pretended things. Mother said, "Look!" and the curtains were bowing ladies; Mother said, "Listen!" and the birds in the wallpaper whistled out to them softly.

She undressed herself and got into bed, taking the wooden duck this time, and the lovely little bead purse that Auntie Annie had given her. Different nights she took different things for company. Once she had taken all her shoes; once she had tried to take the hall fern. . . .

She lay still, waiting. Remembering the loose tooth she wiggled it lazily for a moment; then stopped. The sheets were growing warm around her; her lids were growing heavier, growing weaker, slipping down like velvet. A tap was running somewhere; and you could hear the trees, too—ah-ing together outside, over and over. Now Father was passing the door in his striped dressing-gown; now he was creaking about in the other room. Was Mother there with him? Why didn't Mother come? She thought, all at once: perhaps Mother *wouldn't* come! Perhaps, now that she had Father—

But she did come. She moved in quietly, and sat down on the bed. She had taken her muddy shoes off, and taken the pins out of her hair so that it was hanging long and fair against her dark dress. She sat there for quite a while, without moving and without speaking. Then Father called out "Katherine—" and suddenly Mother jumped up, her hands flying together.

"Katherine," Father called again.

And "Yes," Mother cried. "Yes. Just a minute. I—promised to play with Katie—" and she spun round and caught up the big rubber ball, and began throwing it into the air and laughing and talking. "Come on, Katie! Catch! Catch!"

She was surprised, but she climbed out of bed again. And "Catch! Catch!" Mother cried; and she went staggering about after her, obediently, dizzily,

by Doris Peel

now this way, now that way. But it wasn't any use. The ball flew past her fingers like a fat bird; the light pricked her eyes. She wanted to stop, but Mother wouldn't stop; Mother kept on playing, harder and harder, laughing, talking, her arms lifted up, her hair swinging out. "Now let's bounce it against the wall," Mother cried. "Now let's see if we—"

But she drew back suddenly. She said: "I don't want to. I want to go to bed—"

Mother stopped short. Mother stood quite still, with the ball in her arms.

Why—what was the matter?

Mother looked frightened.

RETURNING HOME

by

Abraham Raisin

HIS own hut seemed barren when he returned from the home of Michael Zavel, the distinguished merchant with whom he had spent most of the evening talking petty business. The hut consisted of but a single room; a wooden clothes cabinet standing in the center served as a wall between the two beds and made you believe there were two, a living room and a bedroom. The nook which the oven occupied near the doorway couldn't even be called a kitchen. There was simply an oven swallowing up the space.

Following the few hours in the rich comforts of Michael Zavel's home, Salmon remained in a long trance, dreaming that he was elsewhere. In a strange dwelling.

The voice of his wife Chanah lying in bed, half undressed—waiting to serve his evening meal—shook him from his dream and made him realize clearly he was home. The home in which he had always lived. And would probably live in till the last day of his life.

His appetite slowly faded as he thought of the meal his wife had prepared—surely potatoes and beans—fed up on it. . . .

"I will not eat!" he said angrily.

Chanah insisted. A loyal wife who constantly guarded his health, she became alarmed:

"What do you mean not eating! You have tasted nothing since three in the afternoon!"

Half asleep, her voice grew husky. Compared to the melodious, firm but refined voice of Michael Zavel's daughter-in-law with her Russian *pozhailewesto* and *obyezetelno* his wife's drab speech and poor vocabulary jarred him. But he could not be angry with her: poverty permeated everything—voice, words, speech. Still he could not become friendly. It was best to be silent.

To summon courage he turned the wick of the dimly burning kerosene

lamp and reached for a tattered book, one of the few left him from his bachelor days, which had neither covers nor title page but the author and contents of which he knew perfectly.

And as the flame burned brightly, illuminating the hut, Salmon sensed the fullness of his poverty.

Lying in one bed, opposite the table, were his two sons and his four-year-old daughter Perele. Her tiny hand was stretched across the face of one of the boys, forming a streak of white light.

He walked up to the bed and tenderly put the warm tiny hand back in place, and its warmth ran through his entire being.

A kindly feeling for Chanah took hold of him. She stood near him, gazing into his eyes and wanting to ease his heavy burden. She knew that invariably upon his return from Michael Zavel he was at war with the whole world. She again reminded him of his meal.

This time he yielded.

It so happened that the meal was good, and tea was served too.

Salmon's spirit rose.

For tea was actually a rich man's luxury.

The brighter light and the glass of strong tea helped considerably.

Chanah's voice was resonant, she was no longer drowsy.

She related a cute thing about Perele.

"She made a doll out of a towel and talked to it, you should have heard her! Just like a grown-up, like a real mother."

Salmon smiled, his eyes turning to the bed where Perele was asleep at the side of her two older brothers.

"Well, and Laibele," he asked, "did he mind you? . . . was he bad?"

"Before he went to sleep he broke into song, just like a real cantor."

"Well, and Schloime?" Salmon asked very seriously. Schloime was now all of ten.

"Schloime—" Chanah uttered his name with the same love she held for the younger children, "he is growing up to be a genius. He found a sort of book of yours to read. He takes after you, he always wants to read."

Salmon glanced pityingly at Schloime. He hiccoughed into the glass of tea and murmured:

"Yes, Schloime will be a man. I hope so. . . ."

And he began to read in an attempt to forget.

And reading the book, written not in the language that he employed in

daily talk but in phrases which were used only to express lofty thoughts, he became exalted. He reached the part which told of Elisheveh whose brow was as bright as the brightness of a summer sky, and her hair—bush of bushes—forgetting Michael Zavel, his beautiful daughter-in-law, and the gorgeous rooms . . . in this book things were more beautiful, more pure, and more true.

But he feared to raise his eyes, to face the large oven, the sign of his cramped, miserable existence.

*—Translated from the Yiddish
by Noah Fabricant*

ON THE WAY

by

Jenny Ballou

WHY did I let her escape? I liked her from the first moment when awakening I felt her eyes fastened on me in the dark, moving bus. I fell asleep again and forgot her. When I opened my eyes I saw the Georgia marsh-grass glistening in the sun like sharp sword-blades that had pierced the dawn, and irresistibly turning my head, I saw the triumphant morning light reflected in her gentle eyes. The morning advanced; the passengers started to exchange furtive conversations across the aisle and she was somehow sitting at my side.

"Do you like Florida?" I asked when she told me she came from there.

"Not when it's damp," she answered. "You know, all I want is a little orange tree, a flower, a bird and a bit of sunshine!" She smiled sweetly with her slightly withered birdlike mouth and whispered: "That's what I like in Florida."

We looked out of the window together in silence as though we had known each other a long time. Suddenly she leaned over and asked: "Do you know where you're at?"

I looked at her thoughtfully.

"Do you know where he's taking us?" She pointed to the driver.

"We're going towards Baltimore."

She laughed softly. "Why, my dear, we're past Bridgeport. These bus men don't know where they're going. That's what maddens me. Do you know where you're going?"

I wondered in silence.

"There! And neither do these bus men know where they're going. They just go round and round taking some people somewhere. Why, I was in Richmond three times last night."

"You were!"

"Yes!" she cried, delighted to be believed. "We got to Connecticut. Then I lost my way. We did nothing but ride round and round all night. *That's* what drives me out of my wits. They just go round and round."

She disappeared. Vaguely I saw her dig her chin into the driver's shoulder like the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*, and ask: "Is this bus going my way?"

The driver turned around good-naturedly, willing to take a joke. "Are you going my way?" she insisted. Then she drew close to him and said something in his ear. The bus stopped. We all looked out of the window; we were in the open country; not a house was in sight. The door opened and she flew out. I watched it all without thinking of it; I was looking at the intense sky and the luminous, gorgeous southern clouds. I saw the bus driver standing against the sky with a puzzled expression on his face; then I absent-mindedly realized what was happening. I got off the bus and saw her growing smaller and smaller against the horizon as though an invisible wind were blowing her away from us.

"You had better go after her," I said.

"I thought she was sick," answered the driver and he started to pursue her. I saw them gesticulating and ran up to them.

"Come with me," I said to her.

"I've been telling him I've often walked from Norfolk to Bridgeport. I won't get on that bus with you. You're past Bridgeport," she shouted to him.

"We're not there yet. He's a good bus man. He'll get us to Bridgeport. Come on," I urged.

"But I tell you I've often walked from Norfolk to Bridgeport," she objected, following me reluctantly. "He's going the wrong way. Before you know it he'll be taking us back to Florida."

She took a seat far from me; and I went to her and asked her some irrelevant question that apparently did not appeal to her reason, for she dismissed me proudly: "I have my own home. I know where I'm going."

I blushed and went to my own seat. Somebody ingratiatingly asked me about her and started to go to her. "Keep quiet," I said angrily. "Let her be." And I blushed again, feeling a double fool. How was it that I was protecting somebody; I, who had never even rehearsed for such a role? While I was reprimanding myself I was relieved to see her come back to me. I liked her companionship because she knew when to be silent. I liked her deep

pride; I liked the phosphorescence of her brain, her Scotch accent and her faith in me. I liked her because she was drawn to me.

"Tell me," she started again, "do you know where you're at?" And the question began to loom as a philosophical problem: I wondered not only whether I knew where I was at, but if the driver and the passengers knew where they were at, and if all of us were not going round and round.

"None of them know where they're at," she said. "They don't know where they're going or what they're doing. They keep changing buses and punching and tearing and changing the tickets. . . . But I won't give up my ticket. No, I won't! I want my trunk. But one says my trunk is in Jacksonville and then the other says . . . oh, it's enough to madden me. . . . If I don't get my trunk I'll have no shoes to wear." She showed me her shoes and sat gazing at them. "I'll have no shoes to wear. . . . They just go round and round; they don't stop for toilets or food. But that's all right. I'll have a meal when I get home." She suddenly remembered something. "Oh, but there's nothing to eat! Well, never mind. I just go on and on that way, anyhow. . . . They'll arrest my husband for being incompetent." She lifted her eyes and smiled. "You know, I was going to call him up when I got to Bridgeport, but I won't give him the satisfaction." And leaning over she told me a secret: "You must never let a man know you can't take care of yourself." Her voice was throaty and tremulant as when a girl speaks of her lover.

The bus man called out "Baltimore! We have ten minutes here."

I alighted from the bus with my companion by my side and we went up a wide stairway. She darted for the room that said "Ladies"; I hurried after her and when she came out she said sharply: "Oh, it's you. You've been waiting for me."

"I don't want to go down alone," I said. "Don't go without me." I went to a telephone booth and, holding her with my eyes through the glass door, I tried to compose a sane telegram. I put the coins into the box and turned around—my lady was not there. I rushed out of the booth. She had vanished as irrevocably as though she were a spirit evoked at a seance that has been piqued and stubbornly refuses to reappear.

Very disturbed, I ran down the bleak stairway, and espying her near the bus with a lost look in her eyes, as though contemplating another escape, my first thought was to be at her side. But my mind was quicker than my feet, for, miscalculating in my hurry, the distance of the last step from the ground, I found myself trying by some magic of equilibrium to hold back from collid-

ing with the dusty pavement of the bus station. I have always felt there is nothing wrong in a woman falling if she does it with grace; and my chief concern was not to violate the aesthetic sense of those who were coming to save me. Feeling myself beyond hope, I threw my palms out lightly, and pushing the rolling earth away from me I succeeded in extricating myself from its magnetism. Although I felt as one who has been precipitately thrown off a toboggan in motion, I was careful, as I stood up, to keep the features of my face immobile, for a policeman, having started a conversation with my companion, stood watching this whole performance with a suspicious blue eye.

I fixed a strand of hair under my hat and went to her. "Come, let's get on the bus."

At the word bus, she flared up: "Never! I'm not going on that bus."

I saw the superintendent of the station coming toward us.

"Come on," I pleaded, "it's leaving. You'll never get to Bridgeport."

"We're past Bridgeport!" she cried disdainfully.

The superintendent kindly took my part. "The bus is starting in a minute," he warned us.

"No! No! You won't get me back on that bus!"

The policeman said something about the Traveler's Aid. This frightened me. I could not betray her faith. I saw the driver going to the bus, and in my haste I made the final mistake. I begged her to go for my sake; but even mad people will not allow their altruism to be exploited. She refused angrily this time; and when the policeman, after a little inner battle between ambition and mercy, said "go ahead," at the touch of his hand, she flew into a rage:

"No, you won't get me back there. You won't get me back there!" she screamed.

I put out my hand and pressed it against her arm. Under her wild glance there was no malice for me, but she flung again at the policeman in a haggard voice: "I tell you, you won't get me back!"

Her voice shuddered through my veins; I heard echos of shouts and screams; I saw straight-jackets, bites, kicks, tearing of hair. Tears came to my throat and blinded me. In that second she made her final escape.

I started after her, but the policeman held me back.

"Are you traveling with that woman?" His eyes plunged into mine. They asked: are you guardian or accomplice? I saw his thought and knew it was imperative that I immediately establish my sanity. In a flash I realized how precarious is the line that divides us from the abnormal; in face of his

suspicion any attempt I made to establish my position on this side of the line might be turned against me. I believed I had enough imagination to prove myself sound; but I had to get to New York that night and there was little time to argue about my sanity if I wanted to catch the bus. And I knew I must save my companion quickly, for I already saw her in tomorrow morning's issue in one of those tragic items we pass over so casually at breakfast: "Woman cannot identify herself in Baltimore."

"Is that woman in your care?" the policeman proceeded, staring at an unhealed scratch on my knuckle that became magnified.

I knew my answer would be weighed. "Yes and no," I said, and realized instantly that the exact truth is not always lucid. But it was too late; the impression I had made on him when he watched me fall, had crystalized.

"Where is your ticket?" he demanded, as though he not only doubted I was on the right bus, but suspected I was on the wrong planet.

I searched my purse, the pockets of my coat, the subpockets of my grey dress, but his disbelief kept me from finding it. The superintendent joined us and the policeman turned to him smartly. But the superintendent had faith, and I immediately recovered the ticket and my self-possession.

"Hmhm" muttered the policeman looking at the ticket as though it had whispered to him. "Hmhm" I heard the Inquisition in his voice.

I turned to the superintendent. "Have you found her?"

"She's in there." He pointed to a lunch room. "She's sitting at the counter with a big breakfast spread before her and refuses to budge."

"I must get her," I said.

"Oh, she's perfectly happy," he answered.

"She's cracked," informed the policeman, pointing to his own forehead. "She'll be better off in an asylum."

These words struck terror in me. "I assure you," I said quietly, "she is absolutely harmless. She is on her way home. I will keep her with me all the way." This seemed no recommendation to the policeman.

"But I can't get her to come," said the superintendent, speaking loudly above the chugging of the motor that now filled the station. "We can't keep the driver waiting any longer. We will put her on the next bus. We'll take care of her."

All the people in the bus were sitting still as though posing for a flashlight, ready to go. Against my will I was pushed on to the bus by the reassuring words of the superintendent that did not reassure me.

We all settled ourselves comfortably. Somebody behind me said it was a crime to put such a woman on a bus alone for such a long trip. Somebody else said it was best that she was left in Baltimore; she would have been detained somewhere and people were more human in the south than up north. This sent a consoling wave through me. I pictured her in her innocence with the huge breakfast before her and thought that after all, mad people and artists create their own world wherever they are. And was not Baltimore a perfectly safe city, the city of H. L. Mencken? I began to soothe myself with literary allusions and pretty rationalizations—but as soon as the bus started to move, a voice in me said that I had done wrong; that I must rush back and save her; that it was pure madness to have let her escape.

The bus passed the lunch counter where I had left her. I cast a look back and never in my life have I experienced such a sense of having sinned. How was it that I let her escape? I have never thought much about virtue and never felt myself unvirtuous—but now I felt I had sinned and understood for the first time the word sin. Why did I leave her on the way? I had betrayed her faith; and it was my sin if she lost her freedom. I asked myself: who will absolve me? I thought: just suppose I threw myself on my knees and a hand touched me from above and a voice said “you are pardoned.” That would be beautiful, but meaningless. The only true remission was to have her by my side, to see that she was safe at home with her husband so that they might live out their madness in peace (there was love in their house—I heard it in her voice). But the bus was carrying me swiftly beyond remission, while I looked out of the window taking note of the weird structure of the houses on the outskirts of Baltimore.

GOODBYE IN TASMANIA

by

Ruth Blodgett

WITH the creaking of a loose brake, the Ford drew up to the railroad station platform.

"There, Evan, what did I bet you I'd get you here in time!" Pa snapped open the case of his old-fashioned gold watch, to compare it with the clock over the station. And Evan began tumbling his bags out of the car.

The children scrambled out on top of the bags, stood, pinched and scared-looking, in a solemn row.

Pa got out too. "You've got plenty of time to get your ticket, Evan. No need to rush!" Then he turned in a business-like way on the children. "Race the little girls up to that last post to get 'em warm, Harry," he commanded.

"A'right," said Harry apathetically. "A'ready, kids—on your mark—set—" As though thankful for something to do, they all tore off like three young steers of these prairies.

Before Evan went to get his ticket, he stopped long enough to help Pa help Ma out of the front seat of the car. She was apt to get stiff in the knees lately whenever she sat too long. She was stiffer than usual now after their long cold early morning ride.

"Yes, anyone who's been runnin' to sick beds over these hills and rough roads for thirty years gets so he can calculate his comings and goings pretty close," Pa went on. He was the only one who seemed to have anything to say. And Evan could still hear him boasting to Ma, even after he had left them, how he'd never yet missed a train or got to a patient too late.

When he came back Ma was standing with her back to Pa, straining her eyes through the early morning mist to see where the track went. Its converging lines seemed to blur into the two upright lines of some tall eucalyptus trees planted on either side of the track, so that Evan had the crazy feeling for a minute that the tracks ran straight up the trees for a take-off into the sky.

Pa, all through with trying to make cheerful conversation, had drawn

his hands farther up inside his overcoat sleeves, and was looking anxiously to see what it was that Ma was looking at so intently.

Far down the platform the children could be heard quarreling. Harry seemed to be reluctant to give the little girls the handicap they demanded on their race back.

"Cut it out, bullyin' the kids, Harry," shouted Evan, and considered the idea of going and umpiring the race. But his conscience told him that would be running away.

"They say the train's ten minutes late." He tried to make his statement casual; but he had taken off his cap to ruffle up his yellow hair, and he caught Pa's eyes with a sidelong troubled look which said, 'Remember, you've got to stand by me in this!'

"Ten minutes late, you say?" repeated Pa a little blankly, as though hunting for his cue. And they both looked at Ma.

Ma still stood following the track into the fog as if she hadn't heard what Evan and Pa had said.

This had been a carefully laid plan of Evan's and Pa's—to arrive here at the station "right on the dot!" "No long drawn-out goodbye before that train comes, Pa! Ma couldn't stand it. No more could I." "Leave it to me, Son!" In their brisk agreement on this point, both had acknowledged that all men are cowards at such times.

No, it wasn't Pa's fault that there must be ten long minutes now to fill.

And yet here were the ten minutes which must be filled. Pa's and Evan's faces both acknowledged, when the two men looked at each other again after looking at Ma, that most anything can happen in ten minutes.

Down the platform the children came galloping, Harry, of course, in the lead. "Where's that train?" he cried, swinging on Evan's arm. "Why don't it come?"

"It'll be here in ten minutes," said Pa.

"You mean we've got to wait ten whole more minutes before we can go get some hot chocolate, Papa?"

"Aren't you 'shamed, Alice! You ought to be thankful we've got ten more whole minutes before Evan's got to go." Even though Mary felt called upon to rebuke her smaller sister, her own little red nose showed she needed that chocolate to warm her up, too. She had not been warmly enough dressed to stand all that wind blowing around the back seat of the open car.

Evan, in his brand new ulster, had not minded the wind.

His little sisters made him angry, because they forced him, at that moment, to compare his new coat with their shoddy, out-grown ones . . . with his father's coat, which was so old that it had grown threadbare around the neck and sleeves and shapeless at the shoulders.

"But I'm cold 'nd I want the chocolate," insisted Alice, her lip trembling.

'Anyway, the kids are acting natural,' thought Evan. And that was something to be thankful for, in this terrible business of saying goodbye.

And then he thought with terror, 'But supposing Pa and Ma should act natural . . . !'

Ma, speaking naturally enough in her rather edgy voice, was saying, abruptly addressing them all, "Well, what can you expect—on a branch line like this! Even after thirty years out in this God-forsaken country, where nothing ever happens on time, your father can't seem to learn he don't need to hurry, the way he used to have to, back there in America."

Evan watched her grasp one gray cotton glove firmly with the other.

"You forget, Mama," said Pa gently, "how folks coming into and going out of the world, even out in the wilderness, can be early as well as late. That's what a doctor's always got to count on." He made an attempt at a laugh.

Evan knew this was his cue to help Pa out—laugh too—or else say something.

Unable to make a sound, he crouched over his bags to tie some harder knots into their tags, thinking, 'But that wasn't really funny what Pa just said.' Anyone's spending thirty years in this poverty-stricken country running to people who were dying . . . when what he'd wanted all the thirty years was to get out and go back where people were alive . . . wasn't funny at all.

Evan had never noticed until this morning, either, how his father was beginning to look old. The reason why the seedy old overcoat didn't fit right was because his father was beginning to let his shoulders droop inside it. And his having to get the false teeth last year had given his mouth a queer expression. With a pain in the pit of his stomach, Evan remembered the leer Pa had made, just now, when he had invited him to laugh with him.

For a minute, Evan felt as if he was going to be actively sick. He turned aside and began an elaborate brushing away of imagined flecks from his own new clothes.

"I expect the fog'll have lifted by the time you start back," he made an effort to say.

"Yes," said Ma. "It'll have lifted. I hope it'll have lifted. Then we can see the train all the way up the valley from the hill."

"Not if we stop to get hot chocolate," said Harry. "And Pa promised we could."

The little girls, clustering about the luggage, began to read off the labels: "Evan Blaisdell—Queen's Line—Launceston to Melbourne—Second Class. Evan Blaisdell—Blue Funnel Line—Melbourne to Liverpool—Second Class."

"Melbourne's where you and Pa got married, isn't it, Mama?" demanded Alice.

"Yes," said Ma, and folded her gray gloves the other way round.

Suddenly Evan wanted to ask Ma if she wouldn't take those gloves off so he could see her hands. Her hands, without the gloves, belonged on the ends of those folded arms, whereas, with them . . . Anyway, he longed to see her hands, even if they were nubbly with rheumatism and grimy around the nails. "What with the brackish water and all the hard work, hands are what go first out here in the bush," he'd often heard her say.

"Pa was the doctor in the hospital in Melbourne, and you were the nurse, weren't you, Ma?" chimed in Mary.

"Yes," said Ma again—and then, "I shouldn't think you'd have to ask when you've been told often enough." She reached up with one of the gray gloves to jerk forward over her forehead the uncomfortable looking hat.

"I wish you'd take that hat off, Ma," said Evan impulsively, and felt like a fool for saying it.

Ma made him feel like a fool. "For heaven's sake, why?" she said. "Why would I be going without a hat on a cold day like this? You put yours back on, Evan, or you'll take cold. And do stop running your fingers up through your hair that way," she added crossly. "You looked real neat when we set out, and now you look as bad as Harry."

"Evan's goin' all the way to England, where you used to live, isn't he, Ma?"

Ma nodded grimly to Alice.

"'Nd then he's goin' to get on another boat and go all the way to America, where Pa used to live," said Mary. "Isn't he, Pa?"

But Pa wasn't listening.

'Will those everlasting kids never stop rehearsing facts every one of us

already knows!" thought Evan. And yet, wanting to please his mother, he put the cap back on.

"Did you ever go to America, Mama?"

"Course not, silly!" It was Harry who volunteered to answer his little sister. "Neither's Pa—I mean never since he once came away. Have you, Pa? England's hundreds 'nd hundreds o' miles from Australia, 'nd America's hundreds 'nd hundreds o' miles from England. 'Nd they're both too far to go to unless you go to stay. Aren't they, Pa?"

"Yes," said Pa. With his back turned to them all, it looked as if his shoulders stood up nearly as high as his ears.

"Cut it, Harry," mumbled Evan, and gave his brother's wrist a quick threatening twist.

Harry let out a howl and kicked Evan on the shins.

"You little devil!" muttered Evan. But, anyway, the hurt on his leg made things seem more natural.

It was Ma who came again to the rescue, saying in her brisk way, "I think you're going to like working for your Uncle Jim, Evan. He sounds real cheery and good-natured in his letters. I think Jim must be a lot like you, Pa, isn't he?" She spoke severely to Pa's back, as much as to say, 'Come now, Pa, cheery, good-natured's your cue, you know—'

"You know what Jim's like now as well as I do, Ma," Pa said a little sullenly, and without turning round. "You know very well I haven't seen Jim since he wore short pants and always had a running nose, like Harry here—"

Things might have gone along all right for the few remaining minutes if it hadn't been for Alice. And Alice was too far away for Evan to reach out and grab her. Besides, one couldn't twist the wrist of a little sister.

"When you went away from your mama in America, how big were you, Papa?" she asked. "Were you as big as Evan is now?" The round blue eyes in her round face had become rounder than ever, as though she had just become aware, for the first time, of some deep unjustifiable mystery under all this going away.

The question hung in the air, making them all aware, children as well as grown-ups. Everyone looked suddenly solemn and frightened.

"I was about a year older than Evan," said Pa thickly.

"And now Evan's going there. That's funny, his going there, and you coming here," said Harry.

"It's not funny. It's youth," muttered Pa.

Evan, who had edged anxiously around saw tears in his father's eyes. Never before had he seen his father cry. Tears sprang to his own eyes. 'So it's Pa, not Ma, after all,' he thought savagely, 'who's goin' to let me down!'

"It sure must be ten minutes by now," he said, pretending to search the track.

"You won't forget, Evan, the minute you ever feel a cold coming on—" Ma's steadying close-clipped voice was handing him out advice now, as if he was still as little as Harry. "Those powders your father put up for you—you'll take one right away, won't you—in half a glass of water?"

Evan blew his nose hard. "No, I won't forget," he said, and caught at the wetness on his face with a desperate brush of the back of the hand. "I guess I forgot to thank you, Pa, for putting those powders up for me."

"Oh, that's all right, Son. Glad to do it for you. There, I guess that's the train now," he added brightly. He, too, hunted the track, using the excuse to shade his eyes with a hand. "Yes, there's smoke—and there's the whistle. There, that's good. I was beginning to worry about what you'd do if you did happen to miss that boat to Melbourne."

"There goes Pa worrying again, when there isn't any need to worry at all," said Ma.

And then came an unnecessary hasty reassembling of the luggage. "So they can be handled quick," said Pa.

Then Alice, grabbing at her father's sleeve. "Didn't you ever go back to see your mama at all ever again after you went away from America?"

"Course not, silly! Don't you know folks can't go hundreds 'nd hundreds o' miles just to see other folks!" cried Harry.

"But didn't you ever want to go back?"

"Idiot!" Girl or no girl, little or not little, Evan gave his sister's arm a pinch.

Alice began to cry.

The train whistled. The roaring of the engine was almost on top of them.

Evan was not sorry he had hurt his little sister. He had hurt her because she had hurt him, so that he stood there grinding his teeth with weakness and rage. His father's crunched-over back inside the old overcoat, the lump of money he was clenching inside his own fist thrust into his trousers pocket both combined to make him angry. 'Home-sick for thirty years,' he thought, 'and now he's given me his money to go with!'

The train thundered into the station.

There were now things to do. The luggage. . . . The children to be kissed.

"Goodbye, Alice! Honest, I didn't mean to hurt—only a little. 'Bye, Mary! Gee, what a big girl you'll be when we meet next. I'll be meetin' you in New York, Harry. And—Pa! When I come back—"

God, was he, a man eighteen, going to cry, as if he wasn't as big as Harry!

Firm hands took him by each arm. A stern voice was saying, "Goodbye, Son! Yes, we'll all be counting the time till you come back."

"Goodbye, Ma!" Shamelessly, he pressed his wet face against hers. "Oh, Mum, goodbye!"

"The train's late. They've got to make up time." Pa was hurrying him along with the bags into a compartment.

It was a very little train, only two carriages, besides the luggage-van. Evan was the only passenger getting on at this station.

The conductor was waving to the engineer. The wheels began to move—slowly.

Evan leaned far out of the window, grabbed at the group there on the platform with his eyes.

"Write—as soon as you get to Melbourne—"

He nodded dumbly.

The wheels began to go a little faster.

"Goodbye—all—" Mary, Alice, Harry, Pa—Ma—his own folks. Never before that minute had Evan known what it meant to belong to people. The little group huddled together there looked complete without him. 'I'm the one left out,' he thought, a desperate sob clutching him. Blinded with tears, he waved his hat. "Goodbye, Ma! Goodbye, Pa!" he screamed, not caring that they could all see that he was crying.

Then thinking wildly 'Perhaps for the last time!' he quickly brushed away the tears so he could see them all clearly once more. . . .

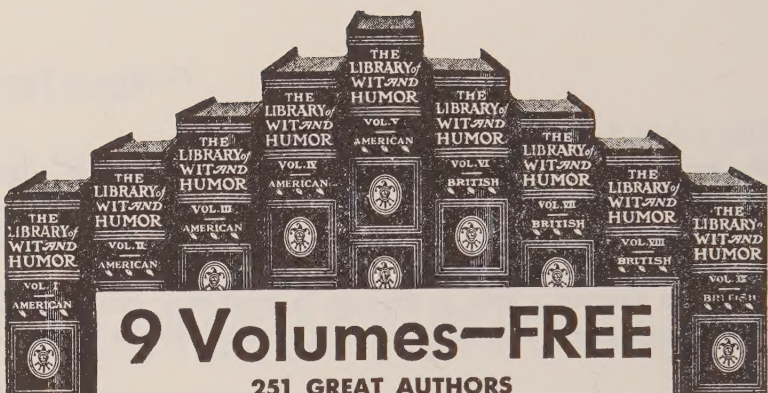
What he saw was some one he didn't recognize at first. It was Ma, of course, but her hat was shoved crazily back, half off her head. He must have done that when he kissed her just now. She looked crazy in the face too, for all her features were working pitifully, all the sternness and control had gone.

'In one more little minute, we'll reach those eucalyptus trees,' he thought, 'and after that, probably never again!'

Like a child, he stretched out his arms to her.

She broke away from the others, and started to run after him—right up the track. With lumbering clumsy motions she was trying to catch up to the train. "It's a lie," she screamed above the engine. "You'll never come back! You know you'll never come back!"

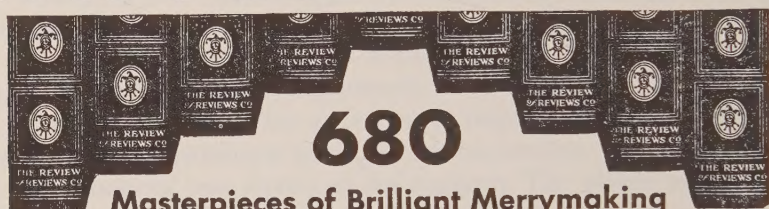
The train swerved a little to the side. A great dark wall of mournful trees shut from his sight that stumbling wild woman who was his mother.



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